

Tomorrow's Community

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of Neighbourhood
Organisations*

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TOMORROW'S COMMUNITY

A Report of a Working Party set up by the
National Federation of Community Associations

edited by
Maurice Broady

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Preface

This is a report of a Working Party set up by the National Executive Committee of the National Federation of Community Associations in March 1978. For several years the Federation has been making changes in its organisation. Most recently, the constitution has been amended so as to make it possible for neighbourhood groups with purposes similar to those of community associations to join the Federation. It was clear, however, that a more thorough examination of the Federation's work and organisation was needed, especially after the publication of the Wolfenden Report, *The Future of Voluntary Organisations*. The Executive Committee therefore invited Professor Maurice Broady, who had recently become president of the Federation, to chair a Working Party with the following terms of reference:

'To consider whether the existence of the NFCA can still be justified; if so, what that justification would be; to consider, further, whether the changed social and political context in which the NFCA now has to operate, as compared with what it was when it was first set up, requires its purposes to be re-defined, and if so, in what way and for what reasons; and to consider the practical implications for policy of any argument we may advance.'

The following were the members of the Working Party:

Professor Maurice Broady Chairman

Ronald Bradley

Peter Clarke

Elizabeth Littlejohn OBE, JP

Barbara Lowndes JP

Ray Matthews

Jean Mekwinska

K. M. Reinold

J. Wardley Smith OBE

Audrey Stallwood JP

Kenneth J. White

The Working Party met on ten occasions between 29 April 1978 and 31 March 1979. Other informal meetings were held, at which some members of the Working Party discussed particular points with Sara Morrison and Nicholas Hinton, chairman and director of the National Council of Social Service, and other officers of the Council. One meeting was held in Leeds to consider the report of the working party which the North-East Area had set up, the recommendations of the East Midlands and North-West Areas' Autumn Conference, and several other papers. In addition a large number of letters, reports and other documents relevant to our inquiry were sent in by members of the Federation, all of which were fully considered in the preparation of this report.

The members of the Working Party wish to thank most warmly all those who, in these various ways, have helped them in their work. We are also indebted to David Austin for his excellent cartoons and to Alan Twelvetrees for his advice and assistance, from which several sections of this report have directly benefited. We wish to express our particular thanks to Iris John of the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University College of Swansea and Maureen Houghton of the NFCA staff, who have acted as secretaries to the Working Party with great willingness and unfailing efficiency.

1.

The Community Association Movement at a Crisis

This inquiry is needed for two reasons, one concerned with how we come to be where we are, the other with what our future development will be. Looking backwards, it is clear that the community association movement, as it could have been described some thirty years ago, has not really fulfilled the high hopes that were then placed upon it. The concerns which community associations were set up to encourage are, in our view, no less valid now than they were then. However, in many ways the movement has been left in the doldrums, as other organisations have come into existence to do what community associations were also intended to do. One reason that has led to this inquiry, therefore, is that we have been obliged to consider whether the community association tradition, which is represented by the National Federation of Community Associations (NFCA), can be reinterpreted so as to give it a continuing vitality.

The second reason has to do with the future of voluntary organisations. Britain has a long tradition of democratic pluralism, that is to say, of dividing the responsibility for social action between statutory authorities and non-statutory, or voluntary organisations. When the Welfare State was established after the war, however, many people considered that the voluntary movement would decline in importance. Quite the reverse has been the case. As statutory agencies have taken over services that were initially provided voluntarily, non-statutory initiatives have extended into other areas. Indeed, over the last twenty to thirty years, there has been a vast increase in the number of local amenity groups and of voluntary bodies dealing with self-help social welfare. The importance of these developments has been increasingly recognised by government. The

rising cost of the social services in particular has made both Labour and Conservative governments aware that the voluntary social services can play an increasingly important role in their provision. They have also recognised the importance of relating policies, especially in underprivileged areas of society, to the informal structure of community organisation.

This recognition of the significance of voluntary organisation led the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust and the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust in 1974 to appoint a committee 'to review the role and functions of voluntary organisations in the United Kingdom over the next twenty-five years'.^{(1)*} The report of this committee was published last year. Aptly described by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) as 'a milestone in the history of voluntary organisations since the last war', it drew attention to their economic significance to the State.⁽²⁾ It concluded that, in 1975, charitable agencies spent about £1,000 million, which was equivalent to about 3 per cent of all central and local government expenditure on the social and environmental services that were covered by the Department of Health and Social Security and the Department of the Environment. About five million people carried out voluntary work in these fields and, between them, they made a contribution equivalent to that of 40,000 full-time workers. However, the fact that central and local government were both increasingly aware of the important contribution which the voluntary organisations could make had not led them to design policies that would help those organisations to develop their work more effectively. The Wolfenden Committee considered that the voluntary and informal sectors of social welfare provision should be extended. They thought that this was likely to become increasingly necessary over the next twenty-five years, because public expenditure on social and environmental services would hardly grow as fast as it has done during the preceding quarter century while demand for additional services was unlikely to get any less. They argued, accordingly, that each local authority should develop a more consistent policy towards the voluntary services in its area, and that the voluntary organisations, for their

*References are given in the bibliography on pp. 85-6.

part, should coordinate their efforts through what it called 'intermediary bodies'. These would be responsible for initiating provision for unmet social needs, for providing services for other organisations, for exchanging information and opinion between organisations and for representing the interests of the voluntary agencies, especially in relation to the statutory authorities. The NCSS nationally and the Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs) and Rural Community Councils (RCCs) locally were the agencies which, in the Committee's view, would be most appropriate to serve as these local 'intermediary bodies'.

These proposals have been discussed extensively by the voluntary agencies. The Government has stated its views on them in a consultative document⁽³⁾ and the National Federation of Community Associations has also published its initial comments.⁽⁴⁾ The NCSS has set up a working party, on which the NFCA is represented, to consider the implications of the Wolfenden Report in greater detail. But it is equally important that the NFCA should consider its own future development in this new context and that is the second reason why this report has been prepared.

In the period after the last war, the community association idea reached a pinnacle of popularity which it has never quite regained. It developed during the 1920s and 1930s in relation to particular and very specific issues. First of all, there was the problem of developing community spirit in the new municipal housing estates that were being built on the outskirts of our cities under the Housing Act of 1919 and its successors. These Acts probably contributed more to social welfare than any other legislation passed between the wars. But as people moved out of the poor housing of the slums into the new and physically healthier environment of the estates, it became clear that they often lacked the social facilities and the sense of identity with their neighbours that had grown out of the economic privations of the slums.⁽⁵⁾

But a still more urgent problem reared its head in the 'distressed areas'. These were the areas which, being heavily dependent on one major industry, were severely affected by the depression of the inter-war period, with its appalling toll of unemployment and poverty. In Durham in the early 1930s, for example, about a quarter of the insured population – twice as many as in the nation as a whole – was

out of work, and half of them had been unemployed for over a year. Dependent overwhelmingly upon coal-mining and on shipbuilding along the coast, both of which had been very badly hit by the slump, the local people were still more impoverished by the fact that many of the small mining villages had no church, no inn, no village hall, nor any other facilities for community life. It was in these circumstances that 'social service clubs' were set up in County Durham to provide 'not only recreational facilities for the physically tired, but a useful occupation for the thousands suffering from the effects of long-term unemployment, a condition aggravated by malnutrition and the mental anguish of watching wives suffer and seeing families growing up in the acceptance of intolerable conditions'.⁽⁶⁾ These clubs enabled the men to make and repair furniture and boots and gave the women the opportunity for craft work and needlework. In this way, they not only provided for leisure but helped the families' meagre unemployment benefits and public assistance allowances to go a bit further. They employed instructors for physical training, music, folk-dancing and drama, organised holiday camps, weekend schools and 'amenity schemes' which helped to transform the detritus of these industrial areas into sports fields, bowling greens and children's playgrounds. In South Wales, similar initiatives were started, often under Quaker auspices and the influence of the settlement movement, in places like Brynmawr and the Rhondda.⁽⁷⁾

One response to these problems was the community centre and the community association. In 1928, a New Estates Community Committee was set up jointly by the Educational Settlements Association and the British Association of Residential Settlements, with the NCSS as co-ordinator, in order to promote not just community centres, but, quite specifically, community *associations*. In Margaret Brasnett's words, 'The educational settlements brought their conception of broad, popular education; the residential settlements their tradition of neighbourhood service; the National Council its own unique experience of village halls and social councils'. The NCSS also contributed its active concern for encouraging local leadership. It was out of this synthesis that the innovative idea of the community association was born, the idea that, more important than a community building was the association that ran and managed it: 'a combined council drawn from both the indi-

vidual members who used the centre as a club and the various neighbourhood groups without accommodation of their own, which shared the premises'.⁽⁸⁾

By the late 1930s, the idea had caught on, stimulated particularly by the NCSS. By 1938, there were 'known to be developments of some sort in connection with Community Centres in over 320 towns or new estates'.⁽⁹⁾ The idea grew in popularity in both planning and educational circles during the war, and in the Dudley Report on housing design⁽¹⁰⁾ and the Ministry of Education's report *Community Centres*,⁽¹¹⁾ which were published in 1944, it gained the stamp of official approval. Many MPs made determined attempts to have community centres specifically recognised in the Education Act of 1944. But though they failed, the government made it clear that the provision of community centres came within the scope of Section 53 of the Act, which placed upon the local education authorities a duty to ensure that 'adequate facilities for recreation and social and physical training should be provided'. As *The Times* commented, 'There is little doubt of the wisdom of making the provision of community centres an integral part of the general educational system'.

At this stage, the development of community associations could justly be described as a 'movement'. Associations were growing in number and there was a clear sense that an active and innovative trend was in the process of developing, in which the NFCA, which had been founded in 1945, was in the lead. Its prestige was assured and the patronage of men of eminence was readily given to it. Sir Wyndham Deedes, for example, one of the great pioneers of the NCSS and one of its vice-presidents, wrote a foreword to Sewell Harris's pamphlet on community centres and associations,⁽¹²⁾ while political theorists of the stature of Sir Ernest Barker and Lord Lindsay considered them to have an important role in their conception of democratic pluralism. Indeed, the local authorities tended to regard community associations as the only legitimate expression of community feeling and endeavour. Thus, the community association idea, nurtured as it was by the NFCA, is one of the most important sources of many of the ideas which have subsequently influenced community development work during the 1960s and 1970s. The NFCA, at this time almost alone, was committed to a

belief in the importance both of neighbourhood initiatives and local organisations and of a pluralistic society, in which responsibility lay with the voluntary societies as well as with the statutory authorities. The ideals of the movement included the notion that the community association should be the focus for the social and cultural life of its neighbourhood, 'a powerhouse of community effort'; that, through the activities which it fostered, it should offer people the opportunity of creating their own social life, of developing their own potentialities and spending their leisure in beneficial social contact; and that it should be run as 'a democratic fellowship of individuals and organisations bound together by one common purpose, the common good'. As Dame Mabel Tylecote, one of the founder-members of the Federation, subsequently recalled, 'From the beginning emphasis was placed upon the importance of initiative being taken from within the neighbourhood, on the necessity for the neighbourhood being an appropriate size (Sewell's definition 'as far as you can push a pram'), on the independence of the association, on the growth of active citizenship through service to the neighbourhood and of personal development through the provision by members themselves of a variety of activities'.

During the past ten or twenty years, notwithstanding the excellent work which many of them continue to do, the spark appears to have gone out of many community associations. For the ideas and ideals to which they were committed have been taken over and developed more effectively, with greater vigour and frequently with governmental support, by many other community organisations, often without any reference to, or relationship with the community associations in their areas.

The apparent irrelevance of community associations to these newer developments in the field of community action is probably related to the fact that their inspiration has come from a very different source. The community association tradition is primarily concerned with community as consensus. It regards the community as an area of common life, within which people will come together, as the NFCA's model constitution puts it, 'without distinction of sex or of political, religious or other opinions' in order to associate 'the local authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a *common effort* to advance education and to provide facilities *in the interests of*

social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation' (our italics). The newer community organisations, on the other hand, are generally more actively concerned with fighting particular environmental issues or with rousing local participation to challenge the decisions of statutory authorities, rather than with promoting recreational activity and an amicable social life.

A second reason for the failure of many community associations to relate themselves to these newer developments has to do with the disparity that has long been noticed between their ideals and their practice. Community associations grew as a practical response to the specific problems of the housing estates and the depressed areas between the wars. Onto them were grafted much more general ideals which, though highly desirable, were honoured more in the breach than in the observance. For having started with the intention of providing 'for themselves and their community the services which the neighbourhood requires', as the Community Centres and Association Committee expressed it in 1937, a community association was soon being defined much more idealistically as 'an organisation of neighbours based on the idea that the personalities of men and women can develop to the best as men and women serve a community which in turn serves them and their development'. Sewell Harris, looking back to those early days in a note which he kindly drafted for the Working Party, has commented on these two aspects of their development. 'We needed financial help, rate relief, buildings, the assistance of national and local authorities... Equally, we had ideas which we wanted to spread, which we believed were for the good of everyone in the country.' And this division between very practical purposes and these wider ideals has continued to characterise this movement.

Unfortunately, not very much has been written about community associations. The most thorough and careful study was published in 1946 by Penelope Hall, who later became a senior lecturer in social science at Liverpool University. In her account of community centres and associations in Manchester, she noted that, despite 'all the idealism and hard work, the contrast between the ideals of the movement and the actualities in Manchester is marked'. Clearly, the community association movement was inspired by the highest of idealism. In 1935, a director of education could speak of a centre as

'an experiment in self-government', of a community association as 'this new development in democracy'⁽¹³⁾; and in the great movement of social reconstruction which created the Welfare State after the war, this idealism was obviously 'in the air'. In the foreword to Miss Hall's book, Dr Mabel Tylecote, then chairman of the Manchester Federation, spoke of community associations as 'a new social force ... upheld by the belief ... that they are helping to lay the foundations for a better way of living'.⁽¹⁴⁾ But today, as thirty years ago, community associations can hardly be said to be living up to the grand ideals that were shaped for them. Though conceived as far more than social clubs, many of them are just that and they are often unrelated to the wider concerns of their local communities. The question of the relationship between ideals and practice is therefore one which we must consider very carefully.

Idealism is obviously important and necessary in any form of social and educational activity: and a community association ought to be concerned with more than leisure pursuits. It should be – and very many are – actively concerned with the wider welfare of its neighbourhood. But ideals and idealism can often be expressed in ways that fail effectively to communicate with people or, worse still, positively deter them from grasping what those ideals mean in practice. To that extent, the idealism of the community association movement has probably been counter-productive; it may also have led the NFCA to exaggerate the degree to which such associations are devoted, in the current phase, simply to 'beer and bingo', despite the useful and valuable work which they are often doing for their members, and which might not otherwise be done. This exaggeration no doubt expresses the excessive disappointment of those whose ideals and aspirations have, in the first instance, been pitched too high. Still more, this emphasis on idealism has probably resulted in two weaknesses which the NFCA must now begin to overcome. First of all, in urging associations to get out into their communities, it has failed to explain to them in practical terms exactly how to go about doing so. And secondly, with its emphasis on ideals and the model constitution, it has failed to take account of the great variety of conditions and circumstances in which associations operate. A sound policy for the future certainly does not overlook the ideals to which the founders of this movement were rightly committed. Neither their

validity, nor that of the liberal-democratic premises on which they are based, is at issue. What *is* at issue now is how best to give those ideals practical expression in the course of the next twenty years.

It cannot be said that the Federation has not been thinking about these questions. Indeed, for the past ten years, it has been actively debating organisational problems. On the one hand, these have concerned its relationship with the NCSS: for as the National Council struggled during the 1970s to find itself a pattern of organisation that might more effectively serve its changing needs, so our relationship to the Council was raised in question. A great deal of time and effort has had to be put into those arguments in the recent past, the more so because the NFCA has a special constitutional relationship to the NCSS and a distinctive way of working, which it has not always been easy for the Council to appreciate, still less to understand.

The Federation has also had to attend to its own internal organisation. The necessity of doing so had already become apparent by 1971, when the General Secretary prepared a very cogent paper *Where do we go from here?* In it, he noted the changes to which we had to adjust: changes not only in the NCSS, where the NFCA had just become part of the newly established Community Work Division, but also the changes in governmental policy that appeared likely to follow the publication of the Russell Report on the training of further education teachers. He urged that members of the Federation had to 'lift our heads out of the sand and look firmly and realistically at this new and disturbing world in which we live'. In his opinion, it was clear 'that the general direction of our endeavours must change and change fairly dramatically and not only this but also swiftly' if we were not to be bypassed. 'The more we look at the possibilities, the clearer it becomes that we need to decide now on our position, or the position we desire, and on the objectives we must strive towards in order to achieve it, arranging those objectives in a proper order of priorities *so that a definite plan can be drawn up.*'

Since that time, the Federation has received reports from a number of working parties. They have dealt quickly with several quite specific problems of organisation. But in spite of their recommendations, the National Federation has not succeeded in reorganising itself so as to ensure that it might develop into what its General

Secretary seven years ago described as 'a ranking national body'. For although one of these working parties set out some thirty recommendations, few were ever implemented. Not only did the National Executive Committee fail to devote much time to debating them, it also showed a singular lack of enthusiasm for putting them into effect.

This is the report of yet another working party. It has subjected the work and organisation of the National Federation to a much longer and more detailed scrutiny than have any of its predecessors. It has also studied these issues more carefully in the light of future strategy. But a working party can only think, deliberate and recommend changes. It cannot decide. The Federation still stands, as it did in 1971, in the General Secretary's striking image, 'not at a cross-roads but at a T-junction . . . To go on as it is will be to go across the T into a cul-de-sac from which there will be no turning; a turn to right or left must be made'. This report puts forward a set of far-reaching proposals affecting the future of the NFCA. It also indicates a new and wider role for community associations and other neighbourhood groups that follows on from the recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee. There can be no more reports of this kind. This is the last one, and this report will mark either the end of the Federation or its rebirth.



2.

Community Associations as they are

The social idealism of the founding-fathers of the community association movement finds its characteristic expression in the NFCA's 'model constitution' for community associations. The constitution requires membership of an association to be open both to individuals, irrespective of 'sex or of political, religious or other opinions', and to organisations, and it empowers both the individual members and the representatives of those organisations to sit on the association's managing body. Only associations which adopted this or a similar constitution were eligible for membership of the Federation and this meant that many could not be affiliated, even if they wished to be. Other associations have not sought membership. This explains why only about 500 of the 2,500 community associations in Britain belong to the NFCA.

In focusing attention upon the model constitution, the Federation has laid too great a stress upon the ideal and too little attention has been given to community associations as they actually are. Granted, a good deal is known from experience about their great variety but this has only rarely been put down in writing; nor has much been written systematically about community associations since Miss Hall's inquiry in 1946. Alan Twelvetrees, whose account of four associations in Edinburgh is one of the very few academic studies in this field, found only four books, ten articles and two theses on this topic.⁽¹⁵⁾ With documentation so slender, it is understandable that the Federation's ideas about community associations have tended to be either extremely specific or very general. That is why it appears to have been difficult in previous discussions to keep in mind the very great variety of community associations that is actually to be found. This is unfortunate, for a sound policy must always be related to, even if it seeks to change, the actual conditions with which it is con-

cerned. As Reinold has put it, 'Community work starts where people are, not where we think they ought to be'. One of the Working Party's first concerns, therefore, was to describe the variety of community associations as accurately and succinctly as possible. For it is essential to relate thinking about future policy not to some idealised situation but to an accurate understanding of how such associations actually operate.

The NFCA's model constitution specifies the purposes of a community association as being to bring people together socially; to establish and manage a community centre; to promote education; to provide facilities for recreational and leisure-time activities; to co-ordinate the activities of organisations in a locality; to see that gaps in community service are filled; and to provide a corporate voice for its locality.⁽¹⁶⁾ These purposes divide into two categories: those that are mainly concerned with sociability and those that have more to do with the contribution to the wider society that the association is expected to make. But very few associations actually fulfil all these purposes. For, as Reinold noted several years ago, 'Looking at the position realistically . . . it is doubtful whether more than about five per cent really strive to meet them (the eight objectives). It is beyond the capabilities and resources of the vast majority, and they therefore opt for the one or two which they find most significant in their situation, ignoring the rest. Management of the centre and the development of leisure-time activities are enough to fill their time, leaving them no chance to develop an interest in community problems except as an occasional item on their agendas; as for seeing that the gaps in community services are filled, many do this as an incidental without realising its significance whilst more consider it beyond their means.'

The purposes with which associations are concerned tend to vary according to the stages of their development. The typical association grows initially when residents on new estates come together to overcome both their own social isolation and the many problems with which they are confronted in their new environment. At first, the association attracts a lot of members; it provides social and recreational activities that are lacking locally and it may also act as a pressure group for better facilities. As time goes on, however, the association either dwindles into a rather limited social club or else evolves as an organisation trying to raise the resources that are

needed to get a community centre in which the local activities can take place.

Associations that form under these conditions are usually pretty active. During this initial phase of development, the residents' enthusiasm is usually at its peak, since they are mostly young people who are interested in developing the social life of their district and in pressing for much-needed amenities. With lots of immediate problems to deal with, people easily get involved in the work of the association. Often it will have grown out of a tenants or residents association, so that the leaders take it for granted that a community association should do more than run social events and provide rooms for other organisations within the locality. They recognise that it should also deal with wider issues and act in a representative capacity as well.

However this initial impetus may easily decline as time goes on, so that the members of the association come to see their role in more restricted terms. There are several reasons for this. First of all, most members join the association for very specific reasons: they want to take part in activities such as old-time dancing, to enjoy pie and pease suppers, attend classes or simply to meet their friends. They want to get an amenity rather than to contribute a service to their neighbourhood and, as in most organisations, they are reluctant to do more than engage in the particular activity which they joined to enjoy. A small minority of active and committed members, numbering perhaps only five per cent of the total membership, recognise that an association has a far wider purpose. They constitute an 'inner core' who may be more outward-looking than most of the membership. This inner core, however, may easily become a close-knit coterie, reluctant to change and unwilling or unable to adapt to new possibilities. Sometimes, indeed, the leaders cling onto office within their association simply to preserve their own status. They may build up myths about the complexities of committee work and procedure which can easily dissuade other, younger people from taking part, and they find ways of keeping younger people away from the association by devices such as imposing restrictive conditions on the youth section or charging them high rates for the use of premises. But even for those leaders who take a wider view of the association's role, the more obvious opportunities for working within the com-

munity seem to diminish as the local authority provides the amenities that they have been pressing for; as the residents themselves become older and settle down to a comfortable routine of life, with increasing domestic responsibilities; and as it becomes more difficult to rouse neighbours to take an active interest in community affairs. Issues about which people feel strongly become fewer and the association slowly ceases to concern itself with the changing social needs of its neighbourhood.

At the outset, associations often meet either in private houses or in less congenial circumstances, so that the demand is generated for a hall or meeting place. Provision is usually made by grants from the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the local authorities, which are conditional upon the local people raising a given sum. A further reason for becoming inward-looking arises when the association finally gets a centre. At this point, the need to finance and maintain the fabric takes up so much of the committee's time that it has little inclination to do anything outside the centre itself. It tends to measure success by the activities that are organised within the centre for its own members and, indeed, the committee may well have its hands full in sustaining these activities. This focus on the centre's own activities may also be encouraged if the centre has been provided or helped by a local authority, which often requires returns of attendances to be furnished, especially in adult and further educational classes. More important still, when the neighbourhood organisations, which have joined the association in order to get a community centre, find that the committee meetings are dominated by details about the day-to-day management of the building, they often tend to lose interest in its activities.⁽¹⁷⁾

It is sometimes suggested that community associations that do not have to maintain a centre are more likely to be outward-looking, since they are not obliged to devote so much of their energy to money-raising activities. Certainly, evidence can be found of both kinds of association. But there seems to be no necessary relationship between 'outgoingness' and whether or not the association has a building to maintain. Some small associations certainly find it difficult to raise the money to keep going and can hardly be expected to contribute more actively in their communities. But even where financial worries are less acute, this does not always lead an associ-

ation to contribute in that way. While community associations certainly ought to bear some responsibility for raising their own funds, it clearly helps them not to have to worry excessively about finance. Nevertheless, what is more important is the disposition of their leadership, and no doubt their pattern of organisation as well. In Denton West Community Association, for example, one group has been given responsibility for overseeing the finance of the centre and this has made it possible for other committees to become much more actively concerned with the association's contribution to the wider community.

There is, therefore, a great variety among community associations. Some are little more than agencies which offer rooms for letting to other organisations. Somewhat broader in conception are those that are simply social clubs, operating mainly for the benefit of their members rather than for the inhabitants of their localities as a whole. Some associations, especially the smaller ones, of which there are hundreds up and down the country, find it difficult to do more than to act as clubs and to organise money-raising activities, since they are often hard-pressed to cover their own running expenses. But even such associations may often serve their local communities usefully by making their centres available for a variety of social purposes; and they frequently do much more for their communities in quiet and unassuming ways than is sometimes realised. A mothers' club in a new estate, for example, is making a very tangible contribution to social well-being if it brings together women who otherwise would be socially isolated.

But there are also many community associations which are concerned not only with sociability but with making a direct contribution to the wider life of the community. They therefore fulfil both kinds of purpose. An analysis of the use made of the twenty community centres in the Surrey County Federation in 1976 showed that they catered for all manner of special interest groups including drama, bridge, badminton, dancing; that they organised their own youth, old people's, mothers' sections; ran play-groups for the children; and provided premises for a large number of organisations, ranging from the Women's Institute and Townwomen's Guilds through health clinics to meetings of churches, parish councils and political organisations. In the Fawley and District

Association, to cite another example, as well as the many social and recreational activities that are catered for, there are also weekly meetings of the chiropody clinic, a mother and baby group and lip-reading and speech therapy classes.

But community associations may also adopt a still more active role in their communities. We found some particularly good examples of this in the north-east where associations have changed as their leadership has changed and the local authorities have inspired a new awareness of what can be done. In Sunderland, for example, with the support of a local authority community association liaison officer, the East End Community Association has developed into a particularly effective 'umbrella organisation', and now supports an advice and support centre, a play-scheme and an adventure playground. Ryhope Community Association in the same borough has also been stirred into new activity and has organised carnivals, ward surgeries, sporting events and developed good relations with the press.

One particularly interesting case – that of the Stocksfield Institute Community Association – has been described in a very interesting brochure.⁽¹⁸⁾ Stocksfield is a parish of 2,500 people, about twelve miles west of Newcastle-on-Tyne. Founded in 1960, and with 1,000 members, the association organises a variety of conventional social and educational activities, such as a pre-school play-group, an old people's club, old-time dancing, dancing classes and classes in art, dog training, physical exercise and so on. Many affiliated groups use the centre for their meetings at reduced rates. In addition, the meals-on-wheels service to the adjacent villages operates from the centre and the Old People's Welfare Committee is also based there. In 1969, with the reorganisation of local government in sight, the Association and the Parish Council jointly set up a working party which, over the following year, operating through four study-groups, prepared a detailed development plan for the village. Its recommendations were submitted to the various public authorities, ranging from the Parish Council and the County Planning Committee to British Rail, the Water Authority and the BBC.

This example admirably illustrates what is happening in small scale in many parts of the country, where community associations respond actively and constructively to newly-arising needs within

their localities and thereby make a useful contribution to the development of the neighbourhood. This kind of innovative action, however, does not arise in a vacuum. Most people most of the time are willing to engage in only a few specific activities that appeal to them. As a shrewd Scots observer of our national temperament put it many years ago: 'The English tend to live in a semi-conscious grumbling daze from which they awake periodically to write angry letters to the newspapers, and once in a generation, to perform prodigies of valour and improvisation. When not so engaged they like to be left quietly alone, and can only with some difficulty be persuaded to take steady constructive action for vague and rather suspect purposes. They form themselves naturally into small groups for the pursuit of clear and limited objectives, and, having done so, hand over the running of them to a few willing horses, and can then only with the greatest difficulty remember to pay their annual subscriptions.'⁽¹⁹⁾ Social action, such as that which the Stocksfield Association carried out, if it is to be effective, depends upon the existence of a group of neighbours, who are accustomed, through some organisation like a community association, to talking, working and acting together. The activities they carry out together are usually fairly conventional and ordinary; but they are no less valuable for that. For such activities provide the basis for further corporate action within the neighbourhood, should a particular need arise to call it forth. People often have a great deal of detailed knowledge about their own communities, as well as skills and abilities which are developed more fully in the work of a local organisation, such as a community association. This knowledge and these skills constitute a potential for the community association to become, as Stocksfield became, a local power house of community activity.

Some years ago, an American sociologist demonstrated that the term 'community' had over ninety different definitions.⁽²⁰⁾ For that and other reasons, some sociologists have argued that it is redundant and useless.⁽²¹⁾ We do not accept that conclusion. Nor do we accept the view that a community is only a community when a group of residents is actively campaigning for something or other, a view that appears to be incorporated in the concept of 'community action', to which usage, curiously enough, no sociologist has yet taken exception. Like some of the more enthusiastic protagonists of a

'participating society', who almost appear to consider that a desirable society is one in which everyone is participating in some campaign or committee every minute of the day, the enthusiasts for community action are inclined to take the view that such action should be continuous. But most people have much more interesting and important things to do with their lives than that. They have their homes and families to enjoy, their gardens to dig, their televisions to watch. They have their clubs and pubs or their community associations to attend in their leisure-time. As friends or neighbours or as members of a community association, they develop social links which, valuable and valued as such, are the basis of a sense of community and the source of a potential for concerted action within the neighbourhood, should the need arise. Community, accordingly, refers both to the development of social relationships and to the potential for acting which those relationships make possible.



3.

The Growing Acceptance of Community Work

Community associations, at their best, are not only developing social relationships within their neighbourhoods through leisure, recreational and social welfare activities, they are also acting positively to fill the gaps in community service and to provide a corporate voice for their localities. The National Federation has always seen its role as being to encourage associations to serve these several purposes. Clearly, community associations have not lived up to, perhaps could not have lived up to, the great expectations which were ascribed to them just before and after the war. As the report on *Youth and Community Work in the Seventies* noted, community associations 'were at one time a cornerstone of a broadly-conceived policy for the development of adult education. However, whatever their potential, the community associations have often failed to secure any significant community involvement'.⁽²²⁾ While this may be true, it is paradoxical that the ideas which the community association movement, and the NFCA as its organ, have sought to express are now more widely accepted than ever. In the last ten to fifteen years, voluntary organisations have grown in number, if not in influence within their neighbourhoods, while both central and local government have begun to seek greater community involvement in the development of their policies.

Until the late 1960s, the government's recognition of the importance of community development was fairly limited. After the war, many of the new town corporations and some of the towns that were involved in expansion schemes under the Town Development Act 1952 either employed neighbourhood workers to help incomers adjust to their new circumstances or set up departments that were

more widely concerned with social development. The Ministry of Education, operating through local education authorities, was also responsible for leisure-time provision in youth clubs and community centres, though it tended to be more concerned with providing buildings and wardens to run them rather than with trying to encourage people to set up their own community associations. But the statutory authorities began to be much more interested in community development and participation towards the end of the 1960s.

One of the main factors in this development was the 'rediscovery of poverty'. This was marked in the United States by the start of President Kennedy's 'poverty programme' in 1964 and, in the United Kingdom, by the growing awareness that, despite increasing affluence and all the apparatus of the Welfare State, people were still living in poverty. Another factor was the growth of all kinds of pressure group, notably in the environmental sphere, which were beginning to criticise, protest against and to challenge governmental, and especially planning decisions. The growing complexity and centralisation of decision-making made people feel alienated from government and led them to organise voluntary groups to represent their views more effectively. These concerns resulted in the provisions that were made for citizen participation in the Town and Country Planning Act 1968 and gave an impetus to a wider engagement with problems of deprivation, particularly in the urban areas.

In the implementation of the Urban Aid Programme, which was established in 1968, the government showed its clear intention to encourage collaboration with non-statutory bodies. Under Urban Aid, voluntary organisations were entitled to submit applications for grant-aid through their local authorities for special projects in disadvantaged areas. These included a number of community work initiatives. The twelve community development projects that were financed under this Programme also gave an impetus to what, in most cases, turned out to be a radical interpretation of community participation, which sought to rouse local people to campaign militantly for more resources to be devoted to their areas. All this complemented the establishment of educational priority areas, which had been recommended two years previously in the Plowden Report.⁽²³⁾ In an effort to combat educational disadvantage in the run-down parts of big cities like Liverpool, attempts were made to

bring parents into closer contact with the schools, to organise classes in the community and generally to link the schools and local people more closely together.

Another set of stimuli derived from the growing interest in community work that resulted in the publication not only of the report on youth and community work already mentioned but also of the Gulbenkian Foundation's report *Community Work and Social Change*, in 1968. During the past ten years, community development workers have come to be employed increasingly by social service departments. They have seen their task as being to help the less privileged and less powerful sections of society to get more resources for their neighbourhoods. Similarly, the Youth and Community Service has slowly begun to shift away from work in youth clubs and community centres towards working with people in the community at large.

Since 1970, furthermore, the DES has been urging that school buildings should be more fully used by the communities they serve. Local authorities have therefore been opening schools more readily for use by voluntary organisations and, in some cases, have added community wings to school buildings. Following the reorganisation of local government in 1974, a good deal of this work has been delegated to district councils, whose leisure and recreation committees have often become involved in promoting community initiatives and in establishing effective linkages in the neighbourhoods. The Wealden District in mid-Sussex, for example, has recently proposed that community associations should be set up and has encouraged the parish councils in its district to initiate them. Manchester City Council is also encouraging groups to make use of disused buildings as community centres, with support from Urban Aid, and a number of new 'community groups' have been established. Finally, since 1970, the Association for Neighbourhood Councils has been promoting the idea that there should be neighbourhood councils in urban areas, with statutory status comparable to that of the rural parish councils.

In many ways, these developments overlap and sometimes even replicate the functions of community associations. But desirable though this growing interest in the community may be, it is not without its snags. Of these, perhaps the most important in our judgement is the fact that local authorities have tended to provide buildings

without encouraging the potential users to set up community associations, which could be consulted about their design and take responsibility for managing them once they had been provided. Far too often, local authorities, out of a commendable concern to encourage community development in new estates, have built them and given them over to groups which have not had to take any initiative to get them and which are, therefore, relatively inexperienced and often ill-prepared to run them. At the same time, these centres have tended to be more dependent upon the local authorities than, in our view, they should be. Thus, while our traditional concerns have now found a wider resonance, they have often been travestied in practice.

All these developments within the statutory sector have been complemented, and indeed were mostly preceded, by the rapid growth in voluntary organisations, to which reference has already been made. To the more traditional tenants and residents associations there have been added groups such as the Civic Trust and other kinds of amenity societies, environmental pressure groups and self-help groups of all kinds. More recently, stimulated by the second Gulbenkian Report on *Current Issues in Community Work*, various bodies have established 'resource centres' to provide resources for use by organisations in their areas.⁽²⁴⁾ There is also evidence that some of these local groups are now beginning to set up their own local federations. A Sheffield Federation of Neighbourhood Groups has recently been established. In Manchester, a Federation of Local Action Groups has also been formed; while in Tameside, an Association of Community Groups is being set up from fifty such bodies, of which only five are community associations. Nationally, the Consumer Council has also recently promoted a National Tenants Organisation.

If we disregard whether these various organisations are or are not community associations, but consider simply the functions which they actually perform within the community, it is clear that many other, and frequently newer organisations serve many of the same kinds of purpose that community associations are intended to serve, though community associations incorporate many other activities as well. The neighbourhood council in particular appears to be very little different from a community association without a large building to manage and maintain. The fashionable 'resource centre'

is also equivalent to the community centre which, in Sewell Harris's words, 'should be thought of by the neighbours as a place to which individuals can turn for ideas, help, advice if they do not know where else to go.'

Thirty years ago, however, the community associations were virtually the only effective and publicly-endorsed expression of neighbourhood social action. Now, they are only one among many such developments. The ideas for which the community association movement stood, and of which the NFCA is the legatee, are now much more fully understood and accepted than they were immediately after the war. The belief in the importance of neighbourhood organisation; of local self-help in social provision; of local leadership and local democracy: all these are now incorporated into community development work and community action. The National Federation now represents only one sector of this whole field of activity, for there are many other bodies which share these same concerns: the National Tenants Organisation, the Association for Neighbourhood Councils (ANC) and the Association of Community Schools. The ANC, in particular, shares with the NFCA a general rather than a specific concern with the local community. *The Working Party therefore recommends that the NFCA should from now on pursue a positive policy of developing relationships with these other national organisations.*

How then should the community associations operate, now that these other, often dynamic neighbourhood organisations have come into existence to promote purposes similar to those of the community associations themselves? Community associations should first of all seek to include them in their membership. By so doing, they would benefit from the new stimulus which such organisations could bring, and their thinking would be opened to wider possibilities of community activity. Alternatively, in those areas where there is no community association, or no effective one, these other organisations should be encouraged to join the Federation. The fact that many kinds of neighbourhood organisation are similar to community associations has been recognised by the rewording of the Federation's constitution so as to allow into membership not only community associations but, more widely, 'neighbourhood groups having objects akin to those of the National Federation'. However,

some newly-formed community groups are effectively party political organisations so that, while we may interpret our membership requirements less rigidly, it is essential to ensure that the principle is maintained that membership of such organisations is open to anyone 'without distinction of sex or of political, religious or other opinions'. The constitutions of tenants associations may well have to be drafted so as to allow them to deal with 'the general welfare of the community'. This political caution appears to be necessary, particularly in relation to resource centres. In Manchester, for instance, a political polarisation appears to be taking place between those mainly political groups, no doubt of a more radical inclination, that are associated with the resource centre and those that are associated with the Council for Voluntary Service. *The Working Party therefore recommends that every effort be made to extend membership of the NFCA both to other community associations and also to neighbourhood organisations that have objects akin to our own.*

In order to facilitate these proposed developments we also recommend that the NFCA be redesignated the National Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations. Such a Federation would be able to play a valuable role in helping neighbourhood groups which are not already related to an effective national organisation. Many such groups appear to be operating without adequate co-ordination and support. The Tameside Association of Community Organisations, to cite one example, has succeeded in bringing under its wing a much wider range of local organisations than community associations, including tenants and residents associations, youth clubs and many other kinds of community organisation. It seems clear that a Federation such as ours could fill this vacuum very helpfully, much in the same way that community associations themselves helped to fill the vacuum that existed in the 1920s and 1930s in the new housing estates and the depressed areas. This development would make particular sense in the context of the proposals that have been made by the Wolfenden Committee, to which we may now turn.

4.

Neighbourhood Organisations as Intermediary Bodies

In the Wolfenden Report, it was argued that the relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors should be mediated by the councils for voluntary service and rural community councils. Both bodies have the same model constitution. They bring together representatives of the statutory authorities and voluntary organisations in their areas in order to 'organise co-operation' for 'any charitable purposes for the benefit of the community . . . and, in particular, the advancement of education, the protection of health and the relief of poverty, distress and sickness'. Since their purposes are so broad and their membership so wide, both organisations are, in the terminology of the Wolfenden Report, generalist rather than specialist.

However, there are many ways in which they differ from each other. First of all, whereas there are RCCs in all the 47 non-metropolitan counties in England and Wales, except Norfolk, CVSs are much less widespread. They are found in 22 out of 32 London boroughs; 33 metropolitan districts out of 36; but only 90 out of a total of 333 non-metropolitan districts. The RCCs are supported by a grant from the Development Commission which is intended to cover a third of their costs whereas the bulk of the CVSs' income comes from their respective local authorities. Though not required by their constitution to confine their work to the rural areas, the RCCs regard their primary responsibility as being for the rural areas and many certainly consider that work there is different from that in the urban areas. However, most of them now describe themselves simply as 'community councils', which suggests that, despite the differences between the work in rural and urban areas, the functions of these two bodies are now virtually identical. At present, CVSs and

RCCs are described as co-ordinating bodies. But the Wolfenden Committee proposed to describe them as 'intermediary bodies' since, as it conceived their role, they would not simply bring together the various local agencies but would also mediate between them and the relevant statutory authorities.

The NCSS's reaction to the Report is broadly favourable and it looks to the Government to give a firm and positive lead in making possible its implementation. The CVSs and RCCs are the only extensive networks of 'local generalist intermediary bodies' and the NCSS, even before the Wolfenden Report was published, had already decided to develop these organisations, imperfect as they are, and in some places as yet non-existent, with the intention 'over the next few years' of providing a comprehensive network of such bodies. The National Council is implementing this policy by giving priority in allocating its resources to the requirements of the CVSs and the RCCs, by promoting research to clarify the relationship between voluntary organisations and local authorities, and by seeking finance from trusts to support local intermediary bodies in metropolitan county areas.

The Working Party also considers that these proposals should be welcomed. The community association movement, and the NFCA in particular, welcomes any move to strengthen the voluntary sector of which it is part. It is obvious that the RCCs and CVSs are the proper agencies to develop as local intermediary bodies and that the NCSS alone has the experience and expertise to promote this development in the most effective manner. But it is equally obvious that the Wolfenden Committee virtually ignored the possibility that the work of these local bodies might be assisted by, if it did not always require the development of, a similar pattern of neighbourhood organisation.

Certainly, the Report recognised that there were many bodies which carried out in the neighbourhood many of the functions ascribed to the CVSs and RCCs. It noted in particular the five resource centres that have recently been set up and commented that 'there are many other intermediary bodies which could be described as local resource centres'. It mentioned specifically neighbourhood councils and settlements, 'which had been fulfilling similar functions since the end of the last century'. Unfortunately, it failed to notice

that community associations had been promoted by the educational and residential settlements in the late 1920s, and that it was through the community association movement that the settlement tradition had been taken into the wider community. Indeed, in designating the NFCA a '*specialist*' rather than a generalist '*national intermediary body*', it also failed to understand that the NFCA, like community associations themselves, is a generalist body. This lack of interest in community associations is only partly explained by the limitation of focus that any such inquiry must inevitably impose upon itself. It also reflects the fact that the Report (and still more the Government's consultative document upon it) appears to regard the voluntary sector as valuable only to the extent that it complements and contributes to the work of the statutory social services, so that little account is taken of the contribution which volunteers, community groups and voluntary organisations generally make to other areas of community life. The Wolfenden Committee's total neglect of community associations can no doubt be regarded as the cost which they have to pay for being in the unfortunate position of having done many of these things unassumingly, but none the less effectively, all over the country for many a long year. They are, in effect, the victims of their own success.

Community associations, however, are not only similar in their constitution to CVSs and RCCs, some of them also perform many of the same functions. In its analysis of the local intermediary bodies, the Wolfenden Report indicated that they had four main functions to perform: development or meeting unmet needs, liaison, representation, and providing services to other organisations. As the NCSS recognised in its reply to the Report, some community associations perform at local level the four functions which Wolfenden designated for generalist intermediary bodies and by their constitution and by their practice, these may be regarded as neighbourhood intermediary bodies.

The community association's liaison function is assumed in the model constitution, under which other neighbourhood organisations are affiliated to it. Local authorities and many other local bodies are represented on the governing bodies of many community associations which, in this way, also help to represent local opinion to the relevant authorities. Quite recently, for example, one community

association in the north of England was asked by the district council to convene a meeting of local organisations and individuals to discuss the future use of a spare plot of land, and it was able to do this without any difficulty because of the links which it already sustained with most other groups in the neighbourhood. Representation again is very common, especially in the early days of housing estate development. Service to other organisations is effected by offering affiliated neighbourhood groups accommodation and secretarial and duplicating services, by arranging training schemes in committee procedure and so on for members of other voluntary organisations and by providing rooms for councillors and MPs to use as surgeries. The development function, or meeting unmet needs, is illustrated by the holiday play scheme for children that was started by a Manchester association, by the adaptation of another community association's centre in Birmingham so as to provide a place where the local handicapped could meet in suitably equipped premises, and by the preparation of a village development plan that has already been described. Other community associations organise luncheon clubs for old age pensioners and other much-needed services, such as hospital car services or shopping for old people.

It could probably be argued that the prime responsibility for developing work in the neighbourhoods should rest with the CVSSs and RCCs, and it seems likely that this is the general direction in which thinking is going in the NCSS. We welcome the statement made by the chairman of the Standing Conference of CVSSs in a letter in *New Society* on 20 July 1978, that they are 'determined to ensure that the functions identified by Wolfenden for local intermediary bodies are developed in a way that results in greater involvement by voluntary and community groups and not in another layer of bureaucracy'. It is certainly true that, in a number of areas, the CVSSs and RCCs have begun to carry out community development work. But most have not, and the supposition that this work could be carried out in the neighbourhoods by a district or county organisation fails to take account of the fact that it is already being done by many community associations and other local bodies, which often have an experience and competence in neighbourhood work which could hardly be matched by CVSSs or RCCs. It would therefore be unwise to ignore the fact that in many places an effective pattern of

neighbourhood organisations already exists and that these bodies have often exercised a good deal of initiative which cannot be ignored in working out the Wolfenden proposals. As the National Council itself remarked in its reply to the Government's discussion document, 'If there is an existing body it is sensible to recognise it'.

A CVS in a city like Swansea, for example, with a population of about 200,000, cannot possibly by itself relate effectively to all the neighbourhoods in the town. Moreover, a city-wide organisation always stands in danger of appearing to interfere from on high in neighbourhood affairs if it tries to do so without working through a local agency, which can endorse and legitimise that intervention. The NCSS itself has commented 'In the final analysis the success or otherwise of co-operation between local authorities and voluntary organisations will be determined locally'; and that point applies with equal force to the relationship between a local intermediary body and the localities or neighbourhoods to which it will wish to be related as its work progresses. The development of the policy of extending the cover of CVSs and RCCs may, therefore, for many purposes depend upon the parallel development of complementary neighbourhood intermediary bodies.

In arguing that community associations — and many equivalent organisations — could act in such a capacity, their effectiveness and their coverage must not be exaggerated. Certainly, the number that are at present carrying out all four functions effectively is small, and there are many that take little active and positive responsibility within their communities. Nor could every single community association, especially the smaller ones, be expected to act in this capacity. But a similar reservation also applies to CVSs, which are extremely varied in organisation and uneven in their activities and effectiveness. The NCSS, in developing the CVSs, recognises that the first criterion for funding them should be that they are '*performing, directly or indirectly, all the functions set out in the Report, or at least have the potential to do so*' (our italics). Therefore, if the diversity of organisation and effectiveness of the CVSs does not disqualify them from developing into the new role proposed for them, neither can it disqualify community associations or their equivalents from developing in a similar fashion at the neighbourhood level.

It is appropriate at this point to consider the position of village

halls, since many of them seem to us to be capable of assuming an intermediary role in many rural areas, analogous to that which we have already indicated for some community associations. Village halls have tended to regard themselves as different from community associations because they are part of a 'rural way of life'. The RCCs have traditionally endorsed this point of view, in which they have been supported by the NCSS. Certainly, in the period after the last war when the village halls policy was established, with the NCSS Village Halls Advisory Service operating through the RCCs, there was good reason for this emphasis. However, the idea that there is a totally distinctive 'rural way of life' is a good deal less valid now, after thirty years of rapid social and economic change, than it was then. But given what is now a rather outdated view of the countryside, the community associations were understandably regarded as distinctly urban organisations, while village halls were equally distinctly rural ones.

Clearly, rural areas may face problems that are somewhat different to those of urban areas. The RCCs also differ from CVSs in their funding and staffing and in the fact that they provide the secretariat for the Rural Industries Bureau, the Association of Parish Councils and the County Playing Fields Association. The constitution of a village hall committee differs only slightly from that of a community association, but the committee, as representing the users of the hall, is chiefly concerned with its management, whereas the community association is also charged with promoting groups within its area, a distinctive community development and educational function that the village hall committees do not have. The village hall model constitution was also drawn up with the existence of the nearest local authority, the parish council, very much in mind. It also took account of the church's contribution to village life. In a small village, with a population of 500 or less, interlocking membership within these bodies is virtually automatic, so that social welfare work in the village may be undertaken by any of these organisations, or by all three of them acting together. The village hall is therefore usually set up to support an already existing community whilst a community association, based on its centre in a new housing area, has the task of creating such a community. Community associations, accordingly have wider functions and more active obligations within their

localities than the village halls traditionally have had so that, broadly speaking, the village hall has played a passive role within its community while the community association has been far more active, in theory if not always in practice.

In spite of these differences, village halls and community associations are becoming increasingly alike. Indeed, they are often treated alike for administrative purposes. Most RCCs process applications for grant-aid from both halls and community associations and, in Lancashire, a joint committee undertakes this task. In Sussex, the RCC has for some time provided the Federation of Community Associations with an office and secretarial support, while in County Durham both come together under the aegis of Community Service for County Durham. None of these joint arrangements appears to cause any difficulties. Even more to the point is the fact that the conventional ascription of village halls to rural, and community associations to urban areas is arbitrary and indeed optional, depending, as it does, less upon any objective criterion than upon whether the local residents choose to regard themselves as villagers or not. Many village halls are bigger than community centres, while the latter are found in many urban areas with smaller populations than the average village. In many counties, a village meeting is offered the choice between setting up a village hall or a community association, according to whether or not it wishes to promote social development as well as simply to cater for it. In Durham and Buckinghamshire, indeed, the village halls have a constitution identical with that of a community association, and Buckinghamshire at one time would not grant-aid a village hall unless it was so constituted. Elsewhere, as in Scotland and Mid-Wales (which is the most extensive and remote rural area south of the Border), villages have opted for community associations rather than village halls. Broadbottom village in Tameside insisted that its social centre should be managed as a community association rather than as a village hall, while in one suburb of Gloucester there is, surprisingly, both a village hall and a community association. The point is strengthened by the fact that, while some community associations operate, like traditional village hall committees, simply as letting agents, some village halls are now becoming more like community associations in adopting a much more active role within their communities.

We therefore consider the distinction between urban and rural areas, that has been used to justify the differentiation between community centres and village halls, to be artificial and arbitrary. In our opinion, accordingly, some village halls and community associations are equivalent institutions, so that the village hall committees in larger villages could rightly be regarded, together with community associations elsewhere, as capable of becoming 'neighbourhood intermediary bodies' in the development of the voluntary sector which we hope may follow the Wolfenden recommendations.

In thinking realistically about the role of neighbourhood intermediary bodies, however, it has to be recognised that relations between CVSs and RCCs on the one side and the community associations and their local federations on the other have not been very close. The difficulties seem to arise more with CVSs than with RCCs, for the latter are frequently willing, and even anxious, to assist community associations, even though they may be rather uncertain whether they are strictly entitled to do so. Thus, the Wolfenden Report noted that 'many small community type organisations (it referred specifically to ethnic groups) are unwilling for one reason or another to join a Council of Voluntary Service (*sic*) or indeed to be associated with it', though 'they might readily accept help from one or other of this range of organisations which we have classified as local resource centres'. The reason for this rather distant relationship is partly that the CVSs and RCCs have appeared to be rather too formal for neighbourhood organisations to feel at ease in them. It is certainly true that differences of social class, and the fact that CVSs and RCCs usually meet during the day, when members of community associations and other neighbourhood groups find it very difficult, if not impossible to attend, have impeded the development of these relationships. Furthermore, since most CVSs receive a good deal of their income from departments of social service, they have been inclined to focus their efforts in that field, rather than in the field of community development. Many CVSs, accordingly, have regarded their major role as being to supplement the work of the statutory social services. Indeed, in many areas, the RCCs and CVSs appear to stand in danger of becoming totally identified with the local authorities from which they get their main financial support, the more so because they are often housed in the same buildings as

the local authorities. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that community associations have tended to be inward-looking and totally unconcerned to link up with wider representative bodies, and that the latter have sometimes, and with justification, regarded community associations as being concerned so exclusively with recreation and leisure as to be quite irrelevant to their own concerns. Nor has the development of good local relationships been helped by the fact that, in the past, the relations between the NFCA and the NCSS have not always been conducive to collaboration.

Certainly, there have been CVSs which have been so heavily committed to social casework and related activities that they have not wished to have any dealings with community activities and have therefore totally ignored not only community associations but neighbourhood organisations too. But it is clear that this disregard of neighbourhood organisations is slowly changing. The Wolfenden Report noted that both CVSs and RCCs, like the local authorities, are becoming increasingly interested in community development. As the NCSS's evidence stated, 'The emphasis of CVS work has . . . been shifting from community work with groups and organisations in the personal social services field to more involvement in environmental matters, information services, and promotional work with self-help and special activity groups'. The RCCs too, through the work of their recently-appointed countryside officers, are becoming involved in planning and environmental problems, including the 'encouragement of local initiatives in the formation of voluntary amenity societies and in the study of problems such as rural transport'. This growing recognition of the importance of the neighbourhood in the traditional concerns of both the statutory authorities and voluntary agencies is to be welcomed. But the time has now arrived when it needs to be rather more carefully thought through, if ambiguity and confusion of function are to be avoided.

The ambiguities arise when neighbourhood groups have direct representation on CVSs. A number of CVSs are beginning to have community care, community action groups and community associations in direct membership. This is particularly confusing where the community associations are also related to an NFCA area organisation, or are members of a local federation; and the confusion will increase if other kinds of neighbourhood organisation become

members of the reconstituted NFCA, as we have proposed. The Manchester and District Federation of Community Associations, for example, was once automatically represented on the executive committee of the CVS, but this is no longer the case. Under the new constitution, all members of the CVS, from a residents group to the largest youth organisation, have equal rights and an equal chance of being elected onto the executive. Now when the CVS requests its members to nominate representatives to sit on other bodies, like the community health councils or the law centre, this arrangement creates problems, not only for the Federation but when the individual community associations that belong to it are approached. This can lead to the nominee of a community association opposing one from the Federation; and it would seem more desirable for a person thus nominated to represent a federation of associations rather than one single one.

Granted, the constitution of the Manchester CVS is atypical. But the same problem arises elsewhere. In Southampton, both the Community Association Liaison Committee and individual community associations can affiliate to the CVS. This is also rather confusing and the confusion is compounded by the fact that a CVS is composed of representatives of specialist organisations, dealing, for example, with the aged or the handicapped, whose local groups often affiliate to community associations, which may themselves also be affiliated to the CVS. Difficulties and even conflicts have also arisen in the past when CVS and local federations of community associations have both attempted to set up community associations. Much of this confusion could be avoided if the CVSs were to distinguish clearly between specialist groups, such as Gingerbread, and community associations which are themselves local co-ordinating or 'umbrella' organisations. Clearly, the solution to this problem lies with the neighbourhood organisations, including community associations, which need to put their house in order. *The Working Party therefore recommends that there should be set up, at district or county level, some kind of federal organisation to which all neighbourhood organisations with purposes similar to those of community associations would belong, which would then relate to and complement the development of the CVS or RCCs.* (In smaller towns the community association might more easily affiliate directly to the CVS, and here

again, we must be willing to accommodate our plans to local circumstances.)

The kind of organisation that we have in mind is already operating in County Durham, where a very interesting and unusual arrangement is to be found. There, the work of the CVS, the RCC and the community organisations is co-ordinated by a body known as Community Service for County Durham. CSCD has a director who works to an executive and finance committee. A rural committee of the CSCD supervises the work which elsewhere is usually carried out by a separate RCC. In addition, there is the Durham Federation of Community Organisations which is one of seven 'associated organisations'. The DFCO already does what the Working Party proposes the new National Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations should do: it co-ordinates not only the community associations but other neighbourhood organisations as well. The number of affiliated organisations has grown from 85 in 1957 to 124 in 1977. The miners welfare schemes and the social service clubs, dating from the bleak days of the 1930s, now number only 10, while there are 72 community associations and 42 village halls in membership. The DFCO has a secretary who is paid by the CSCD. Thus, the community organisations retain an identity by being organised into a federation, but they are also incorporated into an organisation, the CSCD, which is equivalent to a combined CVS and RCC.

This arrangement has grown out of the distinctive, and probably unique context of County Durham: of the depression and its appalling effects; of the social service clubs which generated a sense of the importance of community organisations; and of the support that has always been given by the County Education Committee. It would therefore be unwise to suppose that exactly this pattern of organisation could automatically be established elsewhere. The Working Party, however, considers that, in developing the relationship of community associations with the CVSs and RCCs, a pattern of organisation whereby the community associations are represented on a CVS or an RCC through a local federation would be particularly appropriate.

Any policy, such as that which we have advocated, of encouraging the development of neighbourhood intermediary bodies, if it is to be effective, will have to satisfy a number of conditions. First of all, as

will also be the case if the less effective CVSs are to be brought up to the mark, a programme of development and training will need to be planned over perhaps a five year period. Such a programme must aim to help the CVSs and RCCs on the one hand and the community associations on the other to overcome the stereotyped ideas which each has of the other and which form barriers to effective collaboration. Second, resources will have to be found and allocated to make that programme feasible. Third, in those localities where there is either no community association, or no effective association, but some other comparable organisation, then that organisation will be encouraged to act as equivalent to a community association. Fourth, it will be wise to proceed step by step in such a programme, aiming to encourage the development of these neighbourhood organisations progressively, beginning with the most congenial first, rather than trying, with limited resources, to seek developments everywhere at once. And finally, we should make sure that this development in neighbourhood organisation is publicised as part of a wider policy of growth which is taking place in a new and developing context.



5.

The National Federation's Area Organisation

In the third section of this report, we argued that the NFCA should broaden its membership, as its constitution now permits it to do, and redesignate itself the National Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations. The first sceptical question that was included in the Working Party's brief, however, was whether the continuance of the National Federation could be justified? The question would still be valid even if the Federation's constitution were changed. For it might be argued that, given the changes that are taking place in the NCSS, the National Council itself might quite as effectively do for community associations and neighbourhood organisations what a separate Federation could do. This question will be more fully considered in Section 9 of this report. Here, however, we may simply state our conclusion that there *is* an important role that can best be filled by a reconstituted Federation. But before we go on to consider how the Federation should be reorganised, a comment upon its usefulness is appropriate.

It seemed clear to those who set up the NFCA in 1945 that there was a useful place for some such national body. The reasons for it are no less apparent now than they were then. Obviously, a national organisation cannot promote neighbourhood work by issuing directives from a central office. But it has a distinctive sphere and level of work which is different from that which is normally done by CVSs and RCCs. This is attested by the fact that not only the NFCA, but organisations such as the National Association of Local Councils in the statutory, and the National Tenants Organisation in the voluntary sector, retain a separate existence and identity.

There is undoubtedly a practical and useful role for the NFCA to

perform locally. It provides primarily an advisory service through its headquarters staff and field officers, through its various publications and through training. It serves an essential function locally by providing help, information and practical advice to community associations, and especially in setting up new associations. It helps people to negotiate and collaborate with their local authorities and occasionally mediates in disputes between these groups and others involved in community association work.

Nationally, too, the Federation has an equally valuable role to play. As bureaucracies grow larger, not only in governmental agencies but also in voluntary organisations, it is important that the particular concerns which fall within their ambit are organised in order that their interests should be represented effectively. The Federation, accordingly, represents the interests of the community association movement to governmental and other bodies, and does so even within the NCSS itself. It keeps an eye on and appraises relevant legislation as it affects those interests, and maintains a dialogue with government departments on questions such as the charitable status of community associations, the EEC's regulations about minibuses and capital grants for youth and community centres. Government proposals have sometimes been modified as a result of such representations. The National Federation helps community associations to deliberate together by publishing *Community*, by organising conferences and, in general, providing a forum for the discussion of ideas. Finally, the NFCA sets standards for the training of community association wardens and acts on the employers' side in negotiations with government bodies. In all these activities, the NFCA, for all its limitations, has a national standing as the organisation that has the greatest experience and expertise in this particular field; and if the NFCA offers the best advice and service in this area, that, as the North-East Area's Working Party put it, is a clear justification for its continued existence. That standing is essential if these activities are to be carried out effectively and will, we trust, be carried over to a National Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations.

But over and above these particular functions, a national organisation is needed in order to think forward and to indicate new directions for community associations to consider. This, indeed, is

precisely the purpose of the Working Party's report. It has been suggested to us that community associations ought simply to develop as, and how, they see fit and be offered help as, and when, they consider help to be needed. Of course, no community association can be directed by the National Federation to do anything. The Federation's role is an advisory one; but it can also encourage its members in one direction rather than another. In doing this, there is little doubt that we have at times exerted our leadership role in ways that are counter-productive. But that danger avoided, it is imperative that a national agency should be helping community associations positively to understand what they might become, what role they might perform and how they might do better what they are trying to do. In exercising this measure of leadership, the Federation might model itself upon the Schools Inspectorate which, while it has no executive power and, like ourselves therefore, is obliged to rely upon persuasion, serves a most valuable purpose in disseminating ideas about, and establishing standards of good educational practice in a primarily advisory capacity. This leadership role is essential, especially as we face the changing circumstances of the next decade and consider the implications of the Wolfenden Report. It is now imperative if the community association movement is to come out of the doldrums in which it has been becalmed and if it is to make an effective contribution to the development of the voluntary sector in our national life.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty that the Federation faces organisationally is the fact that there is a gulf between the Federation and its National Executive Committee (NEC) and the local community associations and centres. The Federation therefore appears to be remote from the ordinary community association member. To the activists — the people who serve on community association committees and on area and local federation committees — the National Federation is obviously more real and they are more likely to be interested in the community association movement and its wider significance. But, as in every organisation, the proportion of active members is relatively small. If an association has been recently formed, it will know from direct experience the helpful contribution which the NFCA has made, through its advisory officers, its services and its know-how, in getting the association started. But leaders change; and for most of the older-established associations, member-

ship of the Federation amounts to an insurance policy which entitles them to call upon our services if they get into difficulties and the opportunity to take part in other meetings and the national conference. In any case, it is sometimes only one person in an association who persuades it to join the NFCA and this commitment is often severed when that person leaves the area.

The ordinary members, however, know little about the Federation, and understand still less. They are uninformed and uninterested in the NFCA or its work, nor can they appreciate how it could be of any tangible benefit to them or their associations. They mostly join community associations to participate in the particular social, recreational or educational activities in which they are interested and they get their satisfaction out of those activities and are disinclined to interest themselves in any wider concerns, such as encouraging new associations to be set up or serving on Federation committees. This does not apply only to community associations. It is a characteristic of many organisations that their members do not identify with, still less contribute actively to the work of the national body. It would probably matter little, provided that the Federation was doing a useful job, except for the fact that it is the ordinary association member who has to agree to his association paying its subscription to the National Federation. Generally, people are willing to acquiesce in their community association's affiliating to the NFCA, so long as it does not cost them too much. However, this lack of understanding is a matter of concern, since part of our income comes from affiliation fees. The question is therefore posed as to whether the Federation could make its presence felt more effectively in the community associations themselves.

Representation of the NFCA in the field is limited. The NFCA employs three advisory officers, based in South Essex, Leeds and Bristol who, helped by the headquarters staff, try valiantly to represent it throughout England. Our work in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is undertaken by the respective National Councils of Social Service. However, our staff are called upon directly to assist associations in Wales, where the national body does not offer them a very effective service, whilst help, either by correspondence or occasionally by visits, is also given to associations in Scotland. This is scarcely a satisfactory position. When the government

originally made a grant to the NFCA, shortly after the war, it was given on the understanding that the advisory officers, whom it then became possible to appoint, would extend the NFCA's service and advice to all community associations, whether or not they were, or became, members of the Federation. The NFCA still remains under an obligation to cover the country in this fashion, even though the grant of about £50,000 is hardly adequate to enable it to do so.

It was expected that this grant would be supplemented by the affiliation fees of the increasing number of community associations which we would have helped to establish. The NFCA helps to set up between thirty and forty new community associations each year. It usually requires eight visits from one of the advisory officers to help establish a new association and this, together with the necessary documentation, costs about £500, or £2,900 if overheads are apportioned and included. Some of these community associations in the end may not join the Federation; and of those that do join, many drop out of membership after a few years. The members of the association's first committee usually appreciate the NFCA's help in founding their community association and recognise that they, in turn, should help to set up other associations by paying an affiliation fee to help with the good work. But new officers are appointed after a few years who often know nothing about the initial problems through which the association was guided and advised by the NFCA; and as they no longer have that same sense of obligation to contribute to the development of other community associations, their association drops out of membership of the Federation. The doctrine, on which it was hoped and expected that community associations would recognise their indebtedness to the Federation which had helped them into existence, and would therefore help on its work by contributing their membership fees, has unfortunately not worked out often enough in practice.

It is possible to argue that, since some associations may not feel that they receive a good enough service from the Federation for what they contribute, the only way in which community associations could be brought into membership of the Federation is by appealing to their loyalty to the 'movement' and their obligation to help other members. Indeed, it could also be argued that only those associations which feel that wider social concern should be members of the

NFCA. But these arguments ignore the obvious inequity in such an arrangement, that it would penalise those associations which were members of the NFCA, who would be called upon to support our service to other community associations which did not pay a fee at all.

The question of how we should reorganise our finances and membership will be considered more fully in Section 7. Here, we must return to the question of how we might improve the local representation of the NFCA. The first change that is needed is to reorganise the areas. For the health of the National Federation depends upon the effectiveness of the area committees, which are the main means by which the Federation keeps in contact with its member associations. Where area committees are organising meetings and conferences and keeping associations in contact with each other, NFCA membership is likely to be buoyant.

There are at present sixteen areas, each of which has an area committee and elects a representative to the National Executive Committee. The areas were established in their present form and number in 1973, in anticipation of the reorganisation of local government. The number of areas was determined by the number of representatives it was thought desirable to have on the reconstituted National Executive; and the areas themselves were drawn so as to ensure that there were, in each, roughly the same number of affiliated associations. There are also thirty-five local federations of community associations which complicate and confuse the picture since, unlike the area committees, they are not part of the National Federation's constitutional structure and may include community associations which are not themselves NFCA members. This problem will be considered later on.

The areas, however, have been shown to be far too large to link the Federation effectively to its membership. The South-West Area, for example, stretches from Bournemouth to Lands End; in the Borders Area, the representative from Ayr has to travel four hours each way if the area committee meeting is held in Newcastle. Areas as large as this are far too big to have much meaning for the constituent associations, still less to command their interest or allegiance. The area committees, indeed, are regarded not as local committees so much as an arm of the National Executive Committee.

All this could adversely affect the quality of delegates sent to the Executive, since some capable local people are unwilling to serve on the area committees when they are so remote and take so much time and effort to attend. A previous working group in 1975 noted, in relation to the areas, that 'thirty minutes car travelling time is probably the maximum and this is irrespective of the mileage covered'. People are more likely to be persuaded to participate in more local and more easily identifiable committees, and these are also likely to be more coherent, to secure a greater continuity among their members and thus to reduce the tendency of affiliated associations to drop out of membership.

The Working Party therefore recommends that the number of areas should be substantially increased. Ideally, these areas ought to correspond to local government boundaries for financial and administrative reasons. Obviously, local authorities differ greatly in their views about the role and value of voluntary bodies. But, as the NCSS comment on the Wolfenden Report rightly points out, 'In the final analysis the success or otherwise of co-operation between local authorities and voluntary organisations will be determined locally'. The National Council stressed that the boundaries of local intermediary bodies ought to be coterminous with those of the local authorities; and this point applies with no less force to the Federation's organisation. For since resources can best be raised locally, then any initiatives to increase them must be generated at area level and the area committees ought ideally to be coterminous with the LEAs, with whom they would have to negotiate.

Now that the local authorities themselves are taking a much more active role in community development, the Federation, through its local committees, must work with them hand in hand. Indeed, we believe that the new area committees should make every effort to encourage their local authorities to play the full part in their work. A member of the authority with a particular interest in education or recreation, according to which department sponsors or encourages community development, should normally be co-opted. If the committees had lighter and more relevant agendas than at present, councillors might be expected to attend more regularly; and if this happened, the resulting exchange of ideas would be of benefit both to the local authorities and to the community groups involved.

When the present area organisation was set up in 1973, it was hoped that local authorities would have been willing to finance a paid officer for each area. This did not work out, partly because of financial difficulties but mainly because LEAs tended to be unwilling to share such arrangements with adjacent authorities. In our opinion, the areas should normally correspond specifically to LEA areas. Certainly, community associations are now increasingly being financed by the local authorities' recreation and leisure departments, which have been set up since 1974. But it is important to relate to the education authorities since, under the Education Act, 1944, community associations were recognised as educational charities. A further reason is that it is the education committees which endorse the allocation of capital grants to community associations, even though the proposals may be initiated, and also supported financially, by other committees or by district councils. If our recommendation on area reorganisation was put into effect, there could ultimately be ninety-six area committees, corresponding to the ninety-six LEAs in England. A similar pattern of organisation might also be established in Wales and Scotland.

The Working Party recognised that what have been described as 'London-based organisations' tend to take a monolithic view of local organisations and are often inclined to try to bring them under one uniform and administratively convenient structure. This may fail to take into account the specific circumstances that are important to those organisations and which they alone are best able to appreciate. This general recommendation, therefore, has to be adapted to local circumstances. In some parts of the country, notably in metropolitan counties, where districts are the LEAs, the areas might better correspond to districts. In Kent and Cumbria, responsibility for community associations has been delegated to the districts, which have responsibility for leisure and recreation under the Local Government Act, 1972. Sometimes, as in Thamesdown and Wiltshire, local sentiment and old allegiances would also justify this. We also have to bear in mind that there are associations which are isolated or are situated where there is no local federation, nor likely to be one for some time. This being so, the establishment of any new area must depend upon local consultation. Therefore, while the National Executive Committee has the final decision about the

new areas, this decision should only be made after consultation with the local associations and federations, where they exist.

Such areas obviously might correspond, in some cases, to the terrain of a local federation; and the question now needs to be considered as to their status in our national organisation. These federations generally cover much more convenient, meaningful and realistic territories than the existing areas; and associations join them because of this and because their meetings can also be easily reached by car or local transport. It is also in their favour that they are genuinely indigenous organisations that have been created by the local associations themselves, rather than set up by the NFCA. Indeed, it appears that such federations are still springing up spontaneously. In the Wealden District in mid-Sussex, for example, four community associations, recently set up with the encouragement of the local authority, have formed themselves into a federation to advise on the development of their own and other associations in the area. A further advantage is that, since they generally correspond to the area of an LEA, it is easier for associations to take up issues in common and to argue with one authority, to whose control and regulations they are all subject. Some large federations are well supported by the local authorities, while others depend for their income entirely upon the 'composite scheme', whereby they get 25 per cent of the basic subscriptions payable to the NFCA by those community associations which belong to both the local and the National Federations.

Understandably, then, the suggestion has been made that the development of a new pattern of local organisation should be based upon extending the federations more widely. We consider that there should be only one tier of organisation between the National Federation and the community associations. This appears to be generally accepted. That being so, some accommodation would have to be made between the newly-constituted area committees and the local federations. But the first difficulty is that federations are not widespread: there are at present only thirty-five of them, covering mainly cities such as Bristol or counties like Sussex. Conversely, in Wiltshire, where there are almost no associations outside Swindon, there is little justification for setting up a separate federation.

But a more important reason for our being unwilling to go along

with this suggestion has to do with their constitution. For the local federations present us with a problem. The difficulty arises, firstly, from the fact that the local federations are an anomaly in our organisation. Though they are recognised as eligible for membership of the NFCA, their constitutions are not necessarily accepted by the NFCA. In this respect, the local federations differ from both the associations, which must adopt a model constitution, and the area committees, which are part of our constitutional structure. One rule, however, governs their membership, which is that a local federation must have at least five organisations. A model constitution is available for local federations that wish to belong to the NFCA. Although the guidelines which are attached to it indicate that, in meetings of the local federation, only those representatives of organisations which are themselves members of the NFCA shall be allowed to vote on National Federation business, this is not written into the constitution, nor have all local federations adopted the constitution.

This results in several difficulties. First of all, it is possible for a majority of community associations in a local federation not to be affiliated to the NFCA. Where there is more than one local federation in an area, each is guaranteed a place on the area committee, while those of their members who also belong to the NFCA may be also elected onto the committee. Consequently, local federations can dominate and control the area committees. Furthermore, there is nothing in the constitution to prevent a local federation nominating as its representative someone from an association that does not itself belong to the NFCA; and such a person, as a representative of a local federation in membership of the NFCA, would then be eligible for election as the area's representative on the NEC. The anomaly in this situation is obvious.

Second, the local federations often deal with the same kind of questions as the area committees, causing rivalry and duplication of work. As a result, in those areas that are dominated by local federations, members of community associations tend to regard the federations as identical with the area committees. Because both functions and membership overlap, they tend to become confused and thus fail to appreciate the relevance of their area committees. In any case, the NEC has no power of suasion or control over a local

federation, as it has under Section 10(b) of the Constitution, to require an area committee to 'carry out the general policy of the National Federation'. Thus, while often doing a great deal of useful work, the local federations have preferred to remain autonomous and self-financing and have not always been committed to implementing NFCA policy, still less to increasing the membership of the National Federation. Moreover, with the exception of the composite scheme, there is no adequate incentive for them, or indeed for any community association affiliated to a local federation, to be committed to the Federation. For since the National Federation is obliged to service these local federations, then the community associations affiliated to them, but which are not also members of the NFCA, get the NFCA's services without direct fee and have no incentive either to join the NFCA or to help pay for those services. Therefore, if the local federations are to be brought into the in-line structure of the NFCA, these anomalies must first be eliminated. *In order to achieve this, the Working Party recommends that federations seeking to become members of the NFCA should be required to adopt the model constitution for local federations, and to sign an undertaking that they will carry out the general policy of the NFCA, promote membership in the Federation, and conform to the regulations governing voting on NFCA business. We also recommend that existing federations should be required to adopt the model constitution and sign the same undertaking within a period of five years.*

These recommendations mean that the local federations' assumptions about their autonomy will have to change, and this may well be difficult. But autonomy – either of the NFCA in relation to the NCSS or of the local federations in relation to the NFCA itself – cannot continue to be interpreted as a licence to isolation or 'bloody-mindedness'. It is encouraging to note that the way in which community associations have interpreted their autonomy has changed considerably in recent years, much as the NFCA itself, in becoming part of the former Community Work Division of the NCSS in 1970, interpreted its autonomy less rigorously, so as to be able to contribute to the development of a common approach to community work. Autonomy has to be balanced with a sense of responsibility for the general welfare, if the objectives for which the National Federation stands are to be achieved.



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6.

Staffing and Local Support

Our concern to set up a larger number of area committees is prompted by the recognition that the NFCA is not represented at neighbourhood level as well as we would wish. We now wish to put forward some further recommendations for bridging this gap. In particular, we shall consider how our advisory officers are deployed and how their work might be rationalised and supported more effectively by local initiative.

Doubts were expressed by members of the Working Party as to whether the advisory officers use their time to the best advantage for the members and their associations. This issue was also discussed in the report of the North-East Area's Working Party. In raising it here, we recognise that our officers are working to full capacity. Indeed, we are concerned that they are over-working, operating as they do over such sprawling territories. We were therefore obliged to raise the question whether efforts might not be directed more coherently and to better purpose.

Our advisory officers show great commitment to their work; they travel vast distances and work very long hours, particularly during the evenings and at weekends, when voluntary workers are available for meetings and discussions. The NEC has always allowed the advisory officers a considerable measure of independence in organising their work and in carrying out the Executive Committee's instructions. To this end, they attend meetings of the NEC and are therefore able to contribute their views, not only on any matters that concern their areas, but on policy issues as well. It has been argued that only by having considerable independence can they adapt their work to the requirements of the local associations and that, since their attendance at meetings throughout their area was often demanded at very short notice, it would be difficult for them to

adhere to a coherent plan of work. This procedure is not entirely satisfactory since it results in a rather uneconomical pattern of working which it is difficult to justify, given our slender resources. It means, for example, that it would be very difficult to have the three advisory officers working together in one area in a co-ordinated effort to develop our work there for a few weeks at a time.

A further difficulty is that the advisory officers, because of their willingness to help and to make themselves easily available, have tended to pick up, or have had thrust upon them, jobs such as servicing committees and preparing agendas and minutes. Indeed, it has been suggested that perhaps as much as half their time may be spent on work of this kind. This work, useful as it is to the groups concerned, must be regarded as an uneconomical use of their experience and expertise, since it can and should be done by local people. Of course, they may sometimes lack the confidence or grasp to do it; but this could be developed by training courses which can, as in the past, be organised regionally by the NFCA.

At present, associations are visited only when they are being established, for which as many as six or eight visits may be necessary, or when they actually call the advisory officer in to give advice or, at worst, to handle some crisis or other, often some personal disagreement between a warden or chairman and the community association committee. Depending upon the situation, these crises may require immediate action, and the knowledge that an association can quickly get advice if it wants it is one of the best services which the Federation gives, so we do not propose to alter it. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether such crises occur so often as to justify the expectation that they will occur to determine the advisory officers' work schedule, especially when its diseconomies and disadvantages are so palpable and our resources so limited. Granted, it would be neither efficient nor feasible to try to direct the work of the advisory officers from the centre. Nevertheless, some more effective planning of their work is needed.

As part of our development programme, therefore, the Working Party recommends two changes in their way of working. First, the advisory officers should be required to work to a programme which would enable them to cover their regions more systematically and more economically than at present. To this end, the advisory officers should inform the

general secretary, the area secretaries and the local community associations of their programmes well in advance, so that the NFCA chairman should be able to see at a glance what the plan of work is. Clearly, it would be necessary to be flexible so that the officer would be able to attend urgent meetings when necessary; but there are hardly likely to be very many meetings of sufficient urgency to justify a major disruption of the advisory officers' programmes, especially as the meetings required to form new associations — which should constitute the major part of those programmes — are not usually urgent and could therefore be scheduled in advance, as part of the general plan of work. The central task of the advisory officers is to promote new associations and, in addition, to establish and maintain contacts with local authorities and to carry out 'trouble-shooting', such as mediating between an association and its local authority, if difficulties arise. The skills of the advisory officers would obviously have to be broadened if they are to deal with the other neighbourhood groups as well as community associations, as our proposals require. Thus far, their formal terms of reference have not been widened correspondingly, though they have probably been in contact with bodies such as community councils.

This recommendation does not in any way detract from the desirability of increasing the number of advisory officers working for the Federation. We recognise that the Federation lacks the staff to implement the decisions of the Executive Committee as effectively as we should like. But our resources are not sufficient for that, and it is difficult at present to see how they could be augmented to make such a development possible, especially since it costs a good deal more to support an advisory officer than a member of the headquarters staff, because of the higher travelling and accommodation expenses that have to be met. Another alternative might be to make more use of the CVS and RCC secretaries who might be able to contribute helpfully to, say, a programme for training volunteers to support the advisory officers. But, for the present, this does not seem to be feasible, for not only are they already fully stretched, but they would first have to get a better understanding of community associations and, in many cases, of neighbourhood organisations as well.

The Working Party therefore recommends, secondly, that the NFCA should support the advisory officers by setting up in each area panels of

local people who could relieve the advisory officers of some of their less essential work and also deputise for them where appropriate. This recommendation, which was also made by the North-East Area's Working Party, is one which the NFCA should be particularly pleased to endorse, involving as it does a community development approach. That Working Party noted that the tasks assigned to such 'voluntary advisers', as it described them, would have to be carefully defined, that they would need to be trained and that they would have to be acceptable to the relevant area committees.

The Working Party also recommends that every effort should be made, once the new area committees have been established, to find the means to employ part-time area secretaries. This is already being done in some parts of the country. It will be necessary to reinstate the earlier policy of trying to get support for this purpose from the LEAs. Once our areas correspond to LEA boundaries, this will be more practicable than at our previous attempt in 1974, when our areas covered more than one authority and our effort coincided with the confusion of local government reorganisation. Local authorities are already supporting our work in various ways. The Manchester Federation, for example, receives a grant which has recently been supplemented to cover the costs of a secretary. Other authorities, on the other hand, prefer not to set a precedent by giving a grant, but are quite willing to find ways of covering postage, duplicating and other expenses.

An alternative arrangement for which there are many precedents might be to employ local government officers after hours. In some parts of the country, such as Buckinghamshire for example, young local government officers serve as clerks to the parish councils. The authority might well pay a teacher or a student a modest fee to act as an area secretary, in the same way that some local authorities have seconded members of their staffs to work with bodies like Age Concern. Some anxiety was felt that, if this were done, the local authority might become too dominant in what is a non-statutory organisation. But the independence of some community councils, notwithstanding the financial support they receive from local authorities, suggests that that danger can be avoided. Housewives with secretarial skills might welcome such part-time employment, provided it was paid, however modestly. Such a proposal is bound to have its difficulties. In some areas, it may be difficult to find people

to take such jobs or a capable secretary may leave the area. Moreover, since area officers may change annually, the area committee will have to have the authority to select as secretary someone who might not even be a member of the committee. But it ought not to be impossible to find people to do such jobs, especially if they were to be paid a modest honorarium.

There are clearly tasks which are proper work for the advisory officers: promoting new associations, liaising with local authorities and 'trouble-shooting'; and tasks which are not, such as acting as clerk to area committees or preparing an association's minutes. The latter should be done by locally-recruited voluntary workers. However, there are some jobs that many non-professional volunteers would find it difficult to undertake. For example, while a competent area secretary could take over a wide range of routine work, it is often much more difficult for a member of an area committee, for instance, to visit another association, as a representative of the Federation, with confidence and credibility. But there seems no reason why such representative work could not be undertaken by non-professionals, provided they are carefully selected and adequately trained. Some professionally-qualified workers in the Youth and Community Service, who are already involved in community association work, with their employers' approval might also be willing to represent the National Federation by standing in for an advisory officer, helping in promotional work, dealing with local 'trouble-shooting' and especially attending the annual meetings of community associations or even meetings with local authorities.

If the Working Party's recommendations are accepted and implemented, we might foresee developing over the next few years a pattern of organisation in which the advisory officers would be supported by, and be able to call upon panels of local non-professionals and professionals to help in the Federation's work. Furthermore, if the extraneous work load of the advisory officers were reduced, they would have more time for visiting both our members and other neighbourhood organisations not yet in membership, while working fewer hours and still fulfilling all their aspirations. With local support of these various kinds, it should also be possible to make the presence of the National Federation more widely and more effectively felt.

In this connection, *the Working Party recommends that every neighbourhood organisation in membership of the Federation should be visited as a matter of course once every two years.* Such annual visitations are firmly established in many organisations, such as the Womens Institutes and the Girl Guides, which both employ honorary advisers for this purpose. The North-West Area is already trying to do this, but they have found that most associations will not request such a visit of their own volition. Therefore, the Federation's representative will have to ask to be invited to attend the community association's AGM and to speak there on behalf of the National Federation. These visits and addresses should be related more dynamically to the policies which the Federation wishes to encourage and promote. Rather than simply attending an AGM, the representative should state what the Federation wants to hear discussed and what are the topics on which it wants to know the association's views. The Gloucester Federation is already adopting something like this approach.

In this way, the Federation would be able to explain its views more effectively than it can do even in the revamped *Community Digest*, since people probably accept ideas better from a speaker than from reading. Furthermore, the Federation will be more real to people if it is represented in this way. Every NEC member ought to be able to speak at such meetings and ideally should have a particular subject on which he can speak authoritatively. However, since many members of area committees would find it difficult to 'go in cold' to address an AGM, a programme of training will need to be devised to support this proposal. There is some possibility that, if NEC members were expected to do work of this kind, the number of people willing to stand for election to area committees and the NEC could well be reduced.

Finally, the Working Party recommends that the National Executive Committee should agree that, at the same time that the new area committees are being established, the Federation's staff should make every effort to open discussions with the respective LEAs about financial and other kinds of support; the NEC should accept that, while this is being done, the general servicing of associations will have to be temporarily reduced.

7.

Membership and Finance

The recommendation, made earlier in this report, that the NFCA should now become the National Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations and include not only community associations but other neighbourhood groups as well, implies a substantial increase in the membership of the Federation. It makes possible financial changes which the Working Party consider, both desirable and likely to be generally acceptable; and it is to these implications of our proposal that we now turn.

The salient fact about our membership is that only 20 per cent of some 2,500 community associations in the country belong to the Federation. One reason for this is the fact that, until 1975, only community associations which adopted the NFCA's model constitution or one based upon it could be admitted into membership. The NFCA conceived itself as the guardian of a special tradition and accepted into membership only those associations which conformed to its specific requirements. Our constitution now allows into membership not only community associations but 'other voluntary neighbourhood groups having objects akin to those of the National Federation'. *In order to extend our membership in that direction the Working Party recommends that we should introduce an 'automatic registration' of neighbourhood groups.*

The new area committees would be responsible for producing a register of all the neighbourhood organisations in their areas. A list of existing organisations could be made from the registers of community groups in the youth and community handbooks that are published by most LEAs. Several federations have already made such lists and the NFCA could, with their help, put out a note explaining how to go about doing so. The area committee would also be responsible for listing emerging neighbourhood organisations.

The advisory officers would be able to help in this. All these organisations would be notified that they had been registered in the national office. They would receive annually a newsletter which could include details of NFCA information sheets and so on and, most important, indicate some of the advantages of joining the NFCA, urging them to do so as full members with voting rights. This kind of registration would immediately link the neighbourhood organisations and the reconstituted Federation and since it would make many more organisations aware of the Federation, it would give us a much better chance of recruiting new members. Above all, it would make the Federation a more outgoing and a far less exclusive organisation.

Such a scheme should be started at once, though it will obviously take some time for it to become fully effective and could not be completed until the new area committees have been set up. Clearly, there will be many administrative details to iron out, but none of any major significance, though we will have to take account of the additional financial and administrative burdens which the scheme will incur. Since this will be the first time that such a comprehensive registration has been undertaken, trusts should be approached to help by providing an additional, temporary staff member to oversee this work.

The area committees would also be responsible for collecting subscriptions from the community associations and the newly affiliated neighbourhood groups in their areas, a function which would bring them into direct contact with those groups. *The Working Party recommends that the subscriptions collected by the area committees should be forwarded in full to Bedford Square, since this would facilitate accounting, and that they should then be allocated to cover projects, such as training courses, which would be put forward for consideration by the area committees.*

Individual subscribers are a rather special group, numbering at present some seventy-five people who are interested in the work of the Federation. Some of them are unable to join a community association but they take out an individual subscription as one way to keep in touch with our work. At present they pay £1.50 a year. This entitles them to attend the annual general meeting and to receive the annual report; and for a further payment they can also

receive *Community Digest*. The costs of postage, printing and stationery are now so high that an increase in the annual subscription to £2.00 is imperative but it is not likely to dissuade them from remaining members. We should also make every effort to encourage subscriptions to be covenanted and positively promote this among our membership. *The Working Party therefore recommends that the individual subscriber's fee should be increased to £2.00.*

There are also many experienced and influential people in every community who are committed to our general purposes but who are not at present associated with either the NFCA or with a particular community association. Many of them would be prepared to join a panel of advisers and speakers or to assist our work in other ways. We suggest that this field of voluntary help should be explored and encouraged and that we should in due course recognise individual members in the constitution.

The Working Party also recommends that the membership fee should be standardised and, if possible, reduced. Every system of grading fees according to an association's membership has proved unpopular and difficult to administer; and these difficulties would grow if we aimed to bring a far wider range of organisations into membership. The Working Party considered carefully what the standard fee should be. There is a danger that, if we reduce our fees too much in a time of steady inflation, we should lose rather than gain income. Nevertheless, we decided it was best to act boldly. *The Working Party accordingly recommends a modest flat-rate membership fee of no more than £10.00, to be determined annually by the NEC, in order to encourage more organisations to join the NFCA.* This assumes that many neighbourhood groups would be ready to join a reconstituted NFCA at a relatively low fee and that it would be better to have a large number of organisations paying a modest fee than a smaller number paying a higher one. For this fee, we would expect to maintain the present level of advisory service. However, it would not be possible to mail material to individual associations and neighbourhood organisations, as we do at present, and it would therefore have to be sent in bulk to area secretaries for them to post to their constituent organisations.

Clearly, this level of fee will entail some financial risk. In deciding on the appropriate fee, therefore, several constraints will have to be

taken very carefully into account. First of all, the Working Party considers that the income which we ourselves produce should not fall below the average of £4,500, which we have brought in over the past few years. Assuming that inflation continues, this would imply that, in the short run, the *proportion* of our income that we would raise ourselves might decline, though only by a relatively small percentage. Second, we should also need to assess realistically how many additional organisations could be expected to join the Federation over a given period. For the more organisations in membership, the lower the flat-rate fee could be in order to bring in a given amount. Supposing that, by 1980-81, simply as a result of inflation and without any increase in our actual rate of expenditure, our income had risen to £150,000. At present, we ourselves contribute 7.5 per cent of our income. If we were simply to maintain that percentage, we should need to find £11,250. To do so at a flat-rate of £10.00 per organisation, we would have to bring into membership another 520 community associations or neighbourhood organisations and still more, the lower the fee actually was. To increase our own contribution to our income from 7.5 to 10 per cent would require still more new members. Deciding the final fee-level would therefore involve our making some carefully calculated decisions about the percentage contribution which we should make and, most critically, about the probability of our being able to increase our membership by reducing the fee to a given level.

The Working Party considers that it is essential to act boldly in this matter for a number of reasons. First of all, we cannot possibly expect the NCSS to make a larger contribution, nor would it be desirable for the Council to do so, even if it were possible. We have to help ourselves rather than rely for more of our income on the NCSS. Second, with our present fee structure, our membership can hardly be expected to grow. Any increase in fees would reduce our membership; so that our only way forward is to reduce the fees in the expectation that this would encourage a higher membership. In any event, since we raise only 7 per cent of our income at present, it would not be a very serious matter if, for the sake of making progress, that figure dropped to 5 per cent for a year or two. Finally, there is no doubt in our minds that NFCA members would welcome our adopting a simple and easily understood financial policy and that

this would at once improve the Federation's own morale and help us get more new organisations into membership.

The implications for resources which this proposal will entail cannot be ignored. The National Council might well react sympathetically to a request to allow us temporarily to reduce our own contribution to funds, provided it was seen to be part of a more general and convincing policy for revitalising the NFCA and entailed our making every effort to increase our contribution to 10 per cent in the long run. However, it is clear that, as the number of organisations in membership increases, the administrative burdens on the Federation's secretariat will grow. This could place a further constraint upon this proposal which will have to be considered very carefully in consultation with the NCSS.

However, even if our income is temporarily reduced, and if the demands upon our resources increase, this does not necessarily mean that it will be impossible to service a larger number of organisations reasonably efficiently. But to achieve this, the Federation may have to review its style of operation. Postal arrangements, for example, may have to be rationalised; the staffing structure could be reviewed; work-loads and job-descriptions of officers may need to be clarified and the possibility of withdrawing staff from particular areas of work considered. Finally, the deployment of our resources will have to be kept under constant review, so as to achieve the best results from the limited finance that is available.





The Constitution of the National Federation

In turning now to consider what improvements need to be made at national level in order to make the National Federation a more effective organisation, we must take account of the criticisms that our own members have made about it. The main criticisms are that the NFCA does not act effectively or expeditiously when it needs to do so; that it does not give enough attention to publicity or 'project its image' to the public in the media; and that it does not represent the movement boldly enough in the corridors of power.

Now we cannot expect, nor would it be desirable, to get publicity for the sake of publicity. However, when there are tangible instances of a community association doing valuable work, such as helping immigrants in an inner-city area, then more could probably be done to get publicity for it locally, where it counts. For example, when the Working Party met in Leeds, the local committee succeeded in arranging for the national chairman to be interviewed on the local radio, and many community organisations and local groups could no doubt get similar publicity when they do something interesting or innovative. But it is not so easy to get time or space in the national media, since the community association movement is rarely newsworthy and since the really interesting work is being done, not in Bedford Square, but in the neighbourhoods.

As for the arguments that the NFCA is not bold enough in representing the movement at national level; that our officers are not *au fait* with the directors of education; that we are not very effective in lobbying MPs: a small staff cannot be expected to do everything all the time. Nevertheless, the Federation has on occasion made successful representations. We have recently succeeded in rallying other

voices in a combined approach to dissuade the DES from changing the arrangements for capital grant-aid for community buildings. It is also suggested that we do not get as much credit as we should for such activities because our efforts go under the NCSS's banner, and not our own; that 'entanglement' with the NCSS inhibits us from presenting our arguments separately, and thus making clear our own identity. But this ignores the fact that, some ten years ago, the Federation came to an agreement with the NCSS that submissions to central government should in our common interest be made jointly, though the NFCA, if it thinks it necessary, remains free to submit a separate paper, as it did in response to the Wolfenden Report.

Finally, it is argued that the NFCA does not always do what the NEC expects it to do. Our officers, it is said, take no action on governmental reports, nor are the NEC's decisions implemented vigorously enough: on the contrary, they are 'watered down'. A previous working party's proposal that the local authorities should be approached to finance local staff, for example, was said not to have been put into effect with the drive that might have been expected. But these criticisms take no account of the fact that our staff and resources are limited and are already over-stretched, and that there are costs in their taking on new duties at the Executive's request, which the Executive rarely considers.

These complaints often reflect a desire to see the Federation a much stronger organisation than it is. They express a conviction that the NFCA, as it is sometimes put, should flex its muscles more strongly in our common interest; that the Federation needs a new orientation; that we need to make a break with the past and to exert a more positive leadership. The North-East Area's Working Party, for example, recommended 'a more up-to-date approach – the NFCA should make more firm decisions, put forward its members' views to government or local authorities, and/or make pronouncements of its own'. The Working Party shares these concerns. Indeed, its overriding theme has been the question how the NFCA can be re-invigorated.

But the Working Party could not fail to notice inconsistencies in these arguments. One paper that was submitted to us, for example, argued at one and the same time that the Federation should give associations a stronger and more decisive direction and that its

powers should be decentralised still more to the areas! Though associations might wish the Federation to flex its muscles, we were rather doubtful whether they would be ready to support the Federation if it sought, in the light of these comments, to give a stronger national direction to their work. The National Federation is, after all, only a federation: its powers have been given, not grudgingly perhaps, but to be used only with the full concurrence of its members. Community associations are not branches of the Federation: the Federation is the creature of the associations, not the other way round, and the constituent associations have clung onto a conception of their autonomy which has often led them to isolate themselves from wider community changes. There are signs that the associations are no longer insisting on their autonomy as strongly as they once did and that they have often accepted the Federation's ideas in their own particular ways. Even so, the Federation's power is constrained. It cannot dictate to associations; its role is to advise and to help and to indicate directions and opportunities. It certainly has a leadership role, but it must lead not by direction but by guidance, by sowing ideas and, above all, by persuasion. However, even on such a basis, much could be done to make the Federation a good deal more effective and we have a number of recommendations to propose to that end.

The main weakness, in our opinion, lies in the structure and operation of the NEC. Essentially, the NEC is a talking-shop; it has hardly been a very business-like body. Indeed, its practice of debating over and over again the reports of its sub-committees, for example, has been very time-consuming. Furthermore, it is hesitant to take executive decisions and prefers to seek consultation far too frequently. These weaknesses may be due in part to the fact that many people, who might be able to make a very positive contribution to the NEC, are already so heavily involved in their own associations that they are disinclined to take on additional responsibilities. Other people, who can run a community association and represent it creditably on an area committee, sometimes have much less to contribute to a *national* executive. It was suggested, indeed, that some executive members had little real sense of commitment to the work of the Federation and little awareness of the wider role that associations could, and should play within a democratic society. Finally, though

the NEC's agenda is now becoming rather more realistic and manageable, it had far too often concerned itself with the irrelevant minutiae of organisation and constitutional niceties, rather than with the general policy of the Federation. As long ago as 1971, the General Secretary suggested that our work was 'in danger of becoming divorced from local reality', and only last year the North-East Area's Working Party also noted that 'there is a distinct feeling that the NFCA is not bothered about community associations'! If the National Executive Committee has lost touch with community associations it is because it is neither dealing with issues which they regard as relevant nor selling its ideas effectively enough. Even when the NEC does have a good idea, however, too few community associations listen to it or are prepared to take its advice. In short, the NEC has ceased to be an effective executive.

The Working Party therefore recommends that the National Executive Committee should be reconstituted and its functions more precisely defined. A National Executive Committee exists in order to determine the Federation's general policy. To this end, its agenda needs to be limited to matters of general importance. If this were done, the NEC would need to meet rather less frequently. Twice a year would not afford sufficient continuity, but it should be possible, without any disadvantage, to reduce the number of NEC meetings to three, instead of four, a year. In rethinking what the Executive should consider, it is important to note that questionnaires that were completed by the North-East and by a joint meeting of the East Midlands and North-West Areas indicated that most area committee members regarded the NFCA's most important function as being to present 'a good image for community associations and to present their views to government departments'. It was suggested that the NEC should also consider the implications for community development of the rising costs of community centre buildings and the growing involvement of local government, and particularly its financial involvement, in this field. The North-East Area's Working Party also proposed that the NEC should organise training courses, international exchanges and comprehensive insurance.

The present NEC has thirty members, comprising one representative from each of the sixteen areas into which England is now divided, together with one representative each from Wales and

Scotland. There are, in addition, two representatives of the NCSS, one from the local authorities in membership, one from the local federations, seven from servicing organisations and one assessor from the DES. We consider this to be about the maximum size for a good working committee. Twenty or twenty-five members are usually present at each meeting. However, if area committees were to be set up in every LEA area, there would be ninety-six of them. It is impossible for every area committee to be represented on the NEC; indeed, the Working Party considers the present figure of sixteen representatives from England to be right. The question then arises how, in the new structure, would these sixteen be elected?

One possibility is that all our members should elect all the sixteen by postal ballot. Another is that all the area representatives should meet, and from their number elect the NEC and possibly the Federation's officers too. But both of these solutions have disadvantages: in particular, they could lead to some areas being over-represented and others under-represented. *So as to avoid this, the Working Party recommends that the new area committees should, for electoral purposes, be grouped into the existing sixteen areas.* The elected representatives of each of the new areas would annually elect from among their number a member of the NEC. This election would be organised by the Federation's headquarters staff, and unless there were special circumstances, would be by postal ballot. We recommend this procedure because it would provide an NEC of a suitable size; ensure an adequate regional representation; and also fit conveniently into our existing area structure.

The Working Party also recommends that we make better use of our power of co-option onto the NEC by increasing the permitted numbers of co-opted members from three to five and by seeking to involve people of national standing, who will be able to keep the NEC abreast of the national debate about matters of common interest and also help to put our ideas more effectively into circulation.

The Working Party further recommends that another smaller committee should be established as a finance and general purposes committee. Its function would be to interpret, and to work out in greater detail, the policy decisions taken by the NEC. One complaint about the way the NEC works at present is that it frequently comes to decisions without indicating precisely how they are to be implemented and, in

particular, without considering the full implications of those decisions for our limited resources. This new committee would be responsible to the NEC for the use of our staff and the implementation of policies. It would be, as the North-East Area's Working Party put it, 'a performance review committee'. It would make recommendations to the NEC and act on matters relating to finance, membership, publicity information and advice, staffing, the programme and honours and awards. It would meet monthly to work out in detail, and to monitor, the implementation of NEC decisions, in consultation with the staff. It would include the president of the Federation, the chairman and vice-chairman, the treasurer, the general secretary, and one representative of the NCSS. Four members would be elected annually by the NEC and one representative from each of the main committees set up by the NEC. The deputy secretary and one of the advisory officers would be in attendance and the committee would have power to co-opt. It would also be empowered to set up sub-committees to deal with any special matters that might arise. Finally, when this committee is set up, the functions of the existing Standing Orders Committee should be reviewed.

The Working Party considers that this re-organisation would give the staff the active and direct support which it very much needs (and we believe would appreciate) in carrying out the policies that the NEC will continue to lay down. In the past, the General Secretary has acted upon the instructions of the NEC to the best of his ability and to the degree that limited resources would permit. The institution of the committee would strengthen the office and role of the General Secretary, by giving him the support which he has long needed to do a really effective job on behalf of the NEC and the membership generally, and by relieving him from carrying the major burden of responsibility and criticism in the future.

9.

The Federation and the NCSS

We turn, finally, to consider our relationship with the National Council of Social Service. The NCSS is also in the process of reviewing its own pattern of organisation and a working party, on which we are represented, was set up in June 1978 to consider the relationships between the CVSs and the RCCs and between them and other organisations, such as community associations, which were performing similar functions. The Wolfenden Committee thought that the NCSS had 'too wide a field to cover'. It argued that 'If it could free itself of responsibility for direct servicing of constituent bodies, its staff would be more able to concentrate on the roles which we have suggested as most important, and they would be relieved from any possible embarrassment, which could arise from having to serve two masters'. Many voluntary organisations have grown in this way, being set up originally by the NCSS and then becoming independent: the list begins with the National Association of Boys Clubs in 1925 and goes through to 1977, when the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux became an independent body. In their comments on the Wolfenden Report, the Council agreed 'that where appropriate the NCSS should continue to establish organisations now linked to the NCSS on an independent basis'. But it did not consider that its purpose would be best served by the Standing Conferences of CVSs and RCCs becoming independent, and both Standing Conferences also thought that such a separation 'would be inappropriate at present'. For, as the NCSS's comments make clear, 'if the functions of generalist intermediary bodies, local and national, are to be strengthened, there is considerable merit and commonsense in both working in harness'.

The Working Party fully endorses that judgement. However, a community association, as we noted in Section 4, has a constitution

which makes it a 'generalist' organisation in its neighbourhood. And if our argument is valid, as we believe it to be, that the work of district and county intermediary bodies would be assisted by, if it were not in some cases dependent upon equivalent neighbourhood organisations, then the reasoning that justifies the CVSs and RCCs remaining associated with the National Council applies equally to community associations, and thus to the NFCA and to a reconstituted National Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations. Indeed, we think that there were good reasons for including the two Standing Conferences and the NFCA in the former Community Work Division of the Council and that it would be wrong to sever those links now.

The outcome of the deliberations within the National Council is not yet clear; indeed, not only the NFCA but also the NCSS is awaiting this report with some interest. But we have had the benefit of a long, informal discussion with the director of the NCSS, Nicholas Hinton, in the light of which some comments on our relationship with the Council are appropriate. Without in any way either prejudging or prejudicing developments, we may perhaps comment on two possible lines of development. It has been suggested that the NFCA might remain a relatively autonomous organisation, or even become fully independent. In either case, it might be possible to come to an agreement with the NCSS whereby financial support was maintained and certain services continued to be made available to the NFCA by the headquarters staff of the Council. Another possibility would be for the links between the CVSs and RCCs and the local community associations to be strengthened, so that in time most of the services to community associations would be delivered through them rather than from a central Federation office. This would presumably entail that the staff now assigned by the NCSS to work under the National Federation would be assimilated into the National Council's structure.

Of the three organisations in the NCSS which represent the intermediary bodies – the two Standing Conferences and ourselves – the NFCA has a particular relationship to the National Council. It is important to understand why this is so and what the difference is. Obviously, there are some differences in the internal constitution of these three bodies. But all three consist of what might be described

as 'grass-roots' organisations, which come together annually for their conferences and annual general meetings and operate under an executive committee or its equivalent. The NCSS is variously represented on these committees. On the NFCA Executive, two members are appointed by the NCSS; on the Executive Committee of the Standing Conference of RCCs, the chairman of the NCSS's Rural Advisory Committee is *ex officio* a member, while the director or his representative, together with their equivalents from each of the other national councils, 'may serve as observers'; on the Central Committee of the CVS Standing Conference 'a member (shall be) appointed by the National Council . . . if the National Council . . . so wishes'. The NCSS representation on these three bodies is not materially different. The real difference arises elsewhere.

The constitution of the Standing Conference of CVSs describes it simply as being 'established within the NCSS as a national association of voluntary co-ordinating organisations'. In the RCC's constitution, the relationship to the National Council is not even mentioned. Only in our case is the relationship described in detail, in the document called the Memorandum of Association. This difference derives from the way that these organisations came to be set up. The Standing Conference of CVSs was first established in 1945, and of RCCs in 1970. Both Conferences were set up at the instance of the NCSS, which managed them through appointed committees until they were able to elect their own. The NFCA, on the other hand, when it came into existence in 1945, had behind it a much longer experience as a directly-elected body, from 1928 when the NCSS's New Estates Community Committee was set up to the Community Centres and Associations Committee and the Consultative Council of Community Associations, which superseded it in 1936 and 1938 respectively. Consequently, the relationship of the NFCA to the NCSS was from the outset more that of an equal partnership than of dependency, a point clearly indicated in the fact that a Memorandum of Association was drafted at all. For in it, the NCSS welcomed the formation of the NFCA and recognised it as 'the principal instrument for the consolidation of the movement *and as a means of democratic expression* for its constituent members' (our italics). The NFCA, for its part, accepted that its own objects were 'in keeping with the general objects of the National Council of Social

Service'. It was therefore agreed 'that the Federation be regarded as *an autonomous group*' within the NCSS and that the NCSS, under Section 4(a), would provide the Federation with 'the necessary services and the secretariat, which will be under the direction of the Federation'. In addition to this, the NFCA has since the end of the war been in receipt of grant-aid from the DES or its predecessors under the Education Act, 1944, a grant which the Federation used to negotiate with the Ministry, either directly or jointly with the NCSS, until the Voluntary Service Unit was set up in the Home Office. It is in recognition of this financial relationship that the DES still appoints an assessor to the NEC.

These factors – its strong democratic tradition, its status as '*an autonomous group*', and its hitherto independent source of finance – for long gave the NFCA a standing and independence which the two Standing Conferences lacked. As a result, the Federation has tended to be a less biddable part of the NCSS than either of the Standing Conferences. It has indeed claimed, and fought for, a measure of independence from the NCSS, which has not been without its effect on the two Standing Conferences, both of which in recent years have themselves been increasingly inclined to assert a greater degree of autonomy. Consequently, it is now accepted that neither they nor the NFCA can be required to accept policies that are laid down by the National Council, but that they may disregard or modify those policies if they think fit so as to meet their own circumstances.

We can readily understand that, from the NCSS's point of view, the Memorandum of Association results in a rather ambiguous relationship with the NFCA. For though our staff are employed by the NCSS, they are assigned to and deployed by the Federation, and it is to our NEC that they are in the first instance responsible. The National Federation, accordingly, may appear as something like a 'double-headed monster' in relation to the NCSS; and this is presumably what the Wolfenden Committee had in mind in suggesting that the NCSS should be 'relieved from any possible embarrassment, which could arise from having to serve two masters'.

The ambiguity about the control of the NFCA's staff, however, does not really present any serious difficulties from our point of view. Such dual responsibility is by no means uncommon in other organisations. A community association warden, for example, is usually

appointed by the LEA but he also works with, and is responsible to, the association's executive committee. Indeed, the present arrangement, though not without its difficulties, benefits both parties. We, for our part, gain considerably from the contributions which the staff of the NCSS, especially in the Finance, Legal and Information Departments, make to our work, a contribution which, in our Treasurer's opinion, is very good value for money. The NCSS benefits no less from our direct association with them and there is reason to suppose that, if the relationship were more strictly defined, the NCSS would benefit a good deal less by not having our expertise directly available. Of course, the National Council may decide to interpret Section 4(a) in a less favourable manner than in the past; and if it wished to force the issue, it would presumably be entitled, as the employer, to reduce our allocation of staff. However, the National Council itself, in its comments on the Government discussion paper on the Wolfenden Report, understandably emphasized 'the dangers of rigidity in introducing formal structural procedures' in place of informal consultations. By the same token, we for our part appreciate the many advantages, for both the NFCA and the NCSS, that derive from the existing system and consider that these benefits far outweigh the danger of 'any possible embarrassment' and that they would be lost if our relationship were more rigidly or more precisely defined.

It would certainly be possible to devise an arrangement by which our staff would be fully integrated into the NCSS structure, by arranging for community associations to be serviced through CVSs and RCCs. Quite apart from the changes in their relationship, which would be required by their development as local and neighbourhood intermediary bodies respectively, this would entail a completely new pattern of relationship between community associations and their local CVSs or RCCs, and require a considerable adjustment of attitudes on each side, as a result. Our advisory officers, based in the regional offices, could still get specialist support from Bedford Square in exactly the same way that Age Concern, for example, though it may sometimes be serviced by the CVS, is able to call upon its own central office for specialist advice. The old public health committees, though constituted by the local authorities, also took their briefs from central government. Indeed, some of the NFCA's

work is already serviced by the National Council's central departments, and some of the time of our headquarters staff is spent on National Council business in committees or discussing community work and other issues on which the Federation can speak with special competence. This collaboration would probably increase if a more coherent policy for developing the voluntary sector were worked out. There might even be considerable advantages for our staff in being more closely integrated with the NCSS, for if they had better opportunities for moving among the different sections of the NCSS organisation, they might then enjoy a broader career structure than they do at present.

However, this kind of reorganisation could have very adverse effects upon the Federation's work. First of all, it is worth noting that the Federation services its constituent associations rather differently from the two Standing Conferences. For whereas the NCSS provides a direct service to CVSs and RCCs, mediated only by one staff member in the Information Department, the material that the Council puts out is 'interpreted' by the Federation's headquarters staff before it is sent out to the community associations. Nor do we pass on everything the NCSS produces to the community associations, for if the material were not sieved, its volume would overwhelm the average community association secretary. In any re-organisation of our relationship with the NCSS, this kind of servicing must be maintained.

But the consequences would be detrimental to our work with neighbourhood organisations for a further reason. It seems highly unlikely that more than a minority of the existing RCC and CVS staff would readily accept servicing community associations as part of their duties. Certainly, not many RCCs would be able to extend their servicing of village halls to cover community associations, still less other kinds of neighbourhood organisation. The Gloucestershire RCC, for example, has not been able to provide even secretarial support for the Gloucestershire Federation of Community Associations and, with its limited resources, it has only been able to organise a joint conference of village halls and community associations once every two years. The favourable possibility that our work with community associations might be better supported than it is at present by the small additional contributions which each CVS secretariat

might be able to make to working with neighbourhood organisations seems, in the light of this evidence, very unlikely. Such a change would also act detrimentally to our own staff who are already over-stretched. For if they were required to undertake a more general role, and especially if they were expected to train CVS staff or induct them into neighbourhood work, which initially would seem to be necessary, then they would be obliged to devote less time than at present to work among community associations and this work would therefore suffer.

A further point to bear in mind is that, even if some degree of integration of staff took place, a separate expertise would still be needed to deal with neighbourhood organisations. The NFCA can certainly be serviced by the 'functional' departments of the NCSS, such as its Legal and Finance Departments, without any detriment to its work. But where the actual work with community associations or in neighbourhood development is concerned, it is, and will remain essential to maintain a specialist staff. The training function, for example, could not be taken over entirely by the general training section of the NCSS, as it is presently constituted; nor are CVS or RCC officers normally qualified to deal with special functions relating to community organisation, of which they, unlike the NFCA's staff, have little experience or expertise. The RCCs, for example, have staff who are expert in setting up and running village halls. But it is not possible for one person to offer sound advice on everything to do with CVSs as well as community associations: some particular expertise will still be needed, especially if our work is extended to neighbourhood organisations at large. Indeed, however organised, the staff themselves would undoubtedly continue to respond to the specialised requirements of their part of the organisation.

The NCSS presumably recognises the importance of these specialist functions. But it is important that we should have explained *why* it has to be recognised. It is also likely that, for reasons given in Section 4, the NCSS would wish, as part of its policy of developing the voluntary sector, to continue to encourage community work at neighbourhood level. In this area, the NFCA has a wider experience and competence than any other section of the Council. That is its strength. Our staff accordingly should continue to service both community associations and other neighbourhood

organisations and should liaise with CVSs as well. The staff would not then lose its distinctive sphere of competence. If it were to carry that specific responsibility within a reorganised or more integrated structure, there would still be a need for an NFCA, a need that would be still more obvious if the two Standing Conferences were unwilling to amalgamate. To this degree, the NFCA ought to determine how its staff is deployed. Considerable difficulties would be involved in any programme of integration that entailed ceding the Federation's power to direct the work of its own staff, as part of the NCSS commitment, or which left the NFCA with only advisory and consultative functions.

The Working Party therefore recommends that the control of the staff should remain with the NFCA. We consider that the Memorandum of Association provides an adequate guarantee of our responsibilities in this matter, for if there should ever be any major conflict of interest and the staff were asked to do something unacceptable to the Federation, then it could always be referred to the NEC. However, some modification of our arrangements with the NCSS may be necessary, and even desirable. Without ourselves wishing to propose any such changes, we recognise that the NCSS is rightly concerned to avoid wasteful expenditure, and particularly the duplication of staff functions. We, for our part, should recognise that the Council would have a right to challenge us, as a constituent organisation, if it considered that there was any duplication of effort for which we were responsible.

A further change which we consider desirable concerns our budgetary system. This is a point which we shall wish to take up in the further discussions about finance that we shall have to have with the National Council. At present, the NCSS's Finance Department prepares the Council's budget, after consultation with its constituent bodies. It would be desirable to adopt a budgeting procedure whereby, with staff costs fixed and a percentage charge allowed for services, the NFCA was offered a given sum to use as it thought best. Efficiency would be improved if our budgeting procedure were tightened up in this way and if we had to argue the allocation of funds for specific purposes.

In the past, the relationship between the NFCA and the NCSS has been rather uneasy, since the Federation has considered itself

obliged to defend what it regarded as its 'autonomy' *vis-à-vis* the NCSS. This was necessary because the NCSS evidently found it difficult to appreciate, and even more difficult to accept that the NFCA, unlike the Standing Conferences over which the Council had much greater suasion, was unwilling to be instructed about what it should do. Nor, under its constitution, was the NFCA or its General Secretary able to accept anything like instructions from the NCSS. In these circumstances, it is difficult to see how the relationship between these two bodies could have been anything but strained, and it is not difficult to understand how the Federation could have over-played its claim to 'autonomy'.

The situation now is rather different, since the NCSS has accepted that the constituent bodies may either disregard or modify the Council's general policies to meet their own circumstances. In any case, the concept of 'autonomy' is less rigorously held than it was some years ago. Nor is it a feasible alternative for the NFCA to break from the National Council. We receive a great deal of support and assistance from the NCSS's central secretariat in regard to accounting, legal and other services. Furthermore, the proportion which we ourselves contribute to the cost of running the NFCA has diminished, and that of the NCSS has increased steadily over recent years. In 1973, of our income of £47,000, 53 per cent came from central government sources, 30 per cent from the National Council's efforts to raise contributions in our common behalf and only 13 per cent from our own members. In 1978, however, of £110,000, the government's contribution stayed fairly stable at 50 per cent, while the National Council's increased and our own decreased to about 7 per cent. Thus, the stark facts are that, in that five year period, the NCSS's contribution increased by 25 per cent and ours decreased by nearly 50 per cent. These facts, together with the additional judgement that, at current subscription rates, we have little chance of raising our income substantially from our present membership, who often neither see the benefits of membership nor grasp the general purposes which the NFCA seeks to promote, mean that we could not continue even our present work on the government grant (even if it were continued, supposing that we become independent of the NCSS). All this means that we must remain part of the NCSS as a matter of self-interest, quite apart from our conviction that, as we

explained in Section 4, we have an important part to play in developing the pattern of intermediary bodies proposed by the Wolfenden Committee.

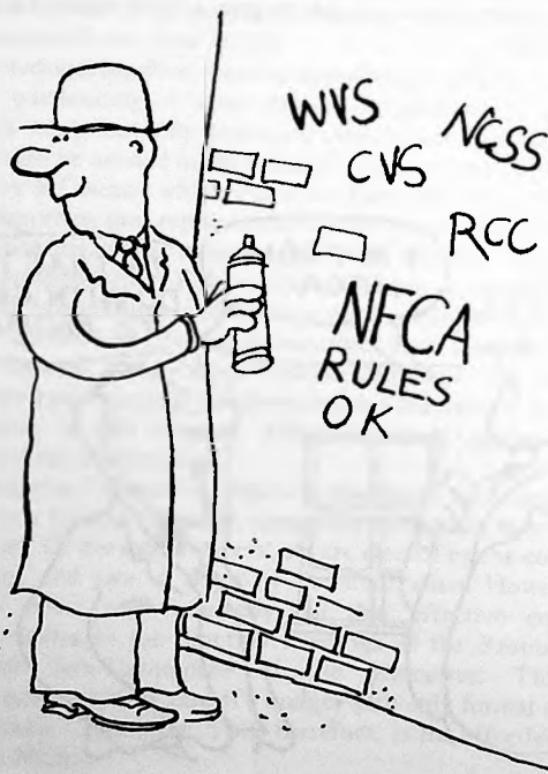
That being so, we consider that our interpretation of our autonomy should and could be much less intransigent than it needed to be in the recent past. We are partners with the NCSS. The Memorandum of Association itself affirmed 'the identity of purpose between the NCSS and the NFCA in furthering the work of local autonomous Community Associations'. *The Working Party agrees that the Memorandum is an appropriate expression of our relationship.* It considers that, while always retaining our right to dissent, we should take full account of the National Council's views in defining our own policies and try, as far as possible, to ensure an alignment between our policies and those of the NCSS.

If our relationship, then, were to approximate more to a partnership, and particularly if some greater integration of staff were regarded as being mutually desirable, then, in our judgement, some changes would be needed in the Council's constitution. The NCSS is governed by a Council which elects an Executive Committee. The Council comprises one representative each from over 200 national voluntary organisations, ranging from the Baptist Union to the National Schizophrenia Fellowship; one each from twenty-three professional associations and sixteen public bodies; a number of individual members and five representatives each from the Councils of Social Service in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In addition, the two Standing Conferences and the NFCA have equal representation on the Council. This Council is equivalent to a shareholders' annual meeting.

The Executive Committee, which is the board of directors since the NCSS is a limited company, comprises twenty-six members and five observers. Of the full members, six are elected by the community organisations and two of them by the Federation. However, this Committee meets only quarterly, so that effective control of operations resides in the monthly meetings of the Resources and Development Sub-Committee of the Executive. This Sub-Committee prepares the Council's budget with only formal reference to the Executive Committee. This, therefore, is the effective power-house of the NCSS.

The Resources and Development Sub-Committee comprises the chairman, two vice-chairmen and the treasurer of the NCSS, five senior staff of director or deputy director status, four members elected by and from the NCSS Executive Committee, and there is power to co-opt up to two members of the Council of the NCSS. The Federation is not represented on this crucial Sub-Committee, not having achieved the necessary electoral support. Both nationally and locally, it is often very difficult to find voluntary workers who can attend weekday meetings. In order to achieve the kind of partnership the Federation seeks, a way to overcome this situation needs to be found. It would be a very great help if the NCSS were to examine the possibility of permitting proxies or deputies to attend in place of elected members who were able to give a valid reason for not being able to attend.





10.

Recommendations and the Next Steps

‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained.’

We began this report by looking backwards in order the better to look ahead. Compared with the great expectations that were placed in community associations, and in the National Federation when it was set up in 1945, it is clear that we are in the doldrums. The purposes for which the NFCA has always stood are no less valid now than they were at the end of the war; and the concerns which inspired our movement then are much more widely accepted. But many other organisations have come into existence during the last thirty years to give expression, in their various ways, to the community involvement for which we once stood virtually alone. If we have allowed ourselves to be pushed to one side, the fault is ours.

The National Federation still has a vital role to play in community development. To play it, however, the Federation must now set about reorganising itself so as to be able to make an effective contribution in the 1980s and 1990s. It has become stuck. What it must now do is to fashion a new interpretation of its purposes and impart a new vigour to their application. The time is more auspicious for voluntary organisations than it has ever been. The Wolfenden Report has pointed the way ahead and we must fulfil our role, and reinterpret our traditional concerns, in the new context which that Report has sketched out. The opportunity is before us and must be seized: the Federation now must chance its arm and risk a change.

The Working Party has tried to indicate specifically the changes which are needed. But though we have been concerned with change, we have not proposed changes for change's sake. Throughout our

discussions and throughout this report, we have been equally anxious to explain why we consider the proposed changes to be needed. If the report is rather discursive in style, it is so because we wanted clearly to justify our proposals. We expect our readers, in considering them, to study not just the recommendations which we have made but the reasoning that has led the Working Party to adopt them.

We believe that these recommendations comprise a package of proposals which, together, define a coherent and comprehensive policy which will help the NFCA to meet the requirements of the next twenty years more effectively. In the body of the report, our recommendations have been introduced as they arose in the course of our argument. But now we present them again more systematically under appropriate headings.

NFCA Policy

1. The NFCA should now pursue a positive policy of developing relationships with other national bodies concerned with neighbourhood organisations (page 23).
2. We should extend membership of the NFCA to other community associations and to other neighbourhood organisations that have objects akin to our own (page 24).
3. The NFCA should be renamed the National Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations (page 24).
4. We should introduce a system for automatically registering neighbourhood groups (page 55).

Area Organisation

5. We should set up some kind of federal organisation at district or county level to which all neighbourhood organisations with purposes similar to those of community associations would belong, so as to complement the development that will be taking place of CVSs and RCCs as local intermediary bodies (page 34).
6. Federations of neighbourhood organisations wishing to become members of the NFCA should be required to adopt the model constitution for local federations, and to sign an undertaking that they will carry out the general policy of the NFCA, promote membership in the Federation and conform to the regulations

governing voting on NFCA business. Existing federations would be required to adopt the model constitution within a period of five years (page 47).

7. The number of areas should be increased. Areas should, wherever possible, correspond to local authority boundaries, for financial and administrative reasons (page 43).
8. New area committees should be grouped into sixteen electoral areas (page 65).
9. Every effort should be made by each area committee to employ a part-time secretary, financed where possible by the local authority (page 52).
10. As each new area committee is established, the Federation's staff should make every effort to get financial or other kinds of support from the appropriate department of the local authority (page 54).

Finance

11. The membership fee should be standardised and, if possible, reduced (page 57).
12. The flat-rate fee should not exceed £10.00 (page 57).
13. The individual subscription fee should be increased to £2.00 (page 57).
14. Subscriptions should be collected by the area committees and forwarded in full to NFCA headquarters (page 56).

National Executive Committee

15. The NEC should be reconstituted and its functions more precisely defined (page 64).
16. The NEC should have power to co-opt up to five members, who should include people of standing in their professions (page 65).
17. A finance and general purposes committee should also be established (page 65).

Relationship with the NCSS

18. We agree that the Memorandum of Association is an appropriate interpretation of our relationship with the NCSS (page 76).
19. Control of the staff should remain with the NFCA (page 74).

Staffing

20. The advisory officers should work to a planned programme, and should inform the general secretary, the area secretaries and the community associations in their area of the programme (page 50).
21. The NFCA should support the advisory officers by setting up in each area panels of volunteers to relieve the advisory officers of less essential functions and to deputise for them where appropriate (page 51).
22. Every neighbourhood organisation in membership of the Federation should be visited once every two years (page 54).

These, then, are recommendations. But recommendations are proposals for action and we must consider how they will be implemented, when they are accepted. Time is of the essence. The Working Party decided to bring its conclusions to the Federation as soon as it possibly could and we also wanted them to be fed into the discussions about the implications of the Wolfenden Report, which the NCSS had set in train. For this reason, we advanced by six months the completion of our work and increased the frequency and pace of our meetings so that the report could be presented at the Federation's AGM in 1979. We hope that the Federation will consider our recommendations with a similar seriousness and urgency.

The pressure of time, however, has meant that we have not been able to discuss, in as much detail as we would have liked, what implications our proposals have upon our resources. These questions will clearly have to be considered very carefully in association with the NCSS. These discussions can be going on at the same time that the Federation is discussing this report. The initial timetable which we have drawn up therefore goes forward only a year and a half.

| | | |
|------|-------|--|
| 1979 | July | The Federation's AGM to receive and consider this report. |
| | Sept. | Area committees to discuss the report in detail and prepare plans for discussion at the autumn area conferences. |
| | Oct. | Area committees to prepare plans for development and changeover. |

| | | |
|------|-------|---|
| | Sept/ | Members of the Working Party to explain the report at area meetings; and to discuss and outline plans for implementing it in that area. |
| 1980 | Oct. | |
| | Feb. | Delegate conference to accept the report, to agree the final programme and fix a timetable for implementing the recommendations. |
| | April | National Executive Committee to: |
| | | 1. introduce subscriptions |
| | | 2. set up finance and general purposes committee |
| | | 3. start automatic registration scheme |
| | | 4. make alterations to constitution, including changing the name of the Federation, for the 1980 AGM. |
| | July | AGM to approve the new constitution and plans for implementing recommendations. |
| | Sept. | Work to begin on forming the new areas. |

By February 1980, we should be able, as this schedule indicates, to fix a timetable for implementing our recommendations, assuming that the resource implications can be satisfactorily worked out by then. That timetable will be, in effect, a plan covering the five years 1980–1985. This report, accordingly, is only the start – no more – of a process of reform which will take a number of years to effect. Thinking and recommending, necessary though they are, are not themselves reform. Reform requires decisions and decisions require action. The discussion of the report at the AGM and in the areas is simply a preliminary to the decisions which must be made if the community association movement and the National Federation are to make the contribution to the nation's well-being which we know they have it in them to make. It is in the confidence that those necessary decisions *will* be made that we commend this report, and especially its recommendations, to our fellow-members of the Federation.

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This report contains a review of the development of neighbourhood work since the war and of the successes and failures of community associations in achieving their objectives. It examines those objectives and their relevance to modern society and looks at some of the problems involved in their achievement. As a consequence of this analysis the report postulates the changes needed to make the work more effective.

The purposes for which the National Federation has always stood are seen as being equally valid today, but it notes the growth of other kinds of neighbourhood organisation and states the need for close relationships with them. Support is given in principle to the findings of the Wolfenden Report on the Voluntary Sector, and the position and importance of community associations within those findings is stressed. Some lead is also given to the ways in which this work should develop in the next ten to twenty years.

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